Section 1, Table 1: Arranged according to geographical position

No.	Name	Latitude	Longitude	Table 2* No.	Table 3** No.	Area in Acres	Area in Hectares
1.1	Ailsa Craig	55° 15N	05° 07W	111	19	245	99
1.2	Sanda	55° 17N	05° 35W	93	54	373	151
1.3	Holy Island	55° 32N	05° 04W	75	20	625	253
1.4	Arran	55° 35N	05° 15W	7	2	106750	43201
1.5	Little Cumbrae Island	55° 43N	04° 57W	64	53	773	313
1.6	Great Cumbrae	55° 46N	04° 55W	39	49	2886	1168
1.7	Inchmarnock	55° 47N	05° 09W	73	106	657	266
1.8	Bute	55° 49N	05° 06W	11	24	30188	12217

*Table 2: The islands arranged in order of magnitude
**Table 3: The islands arranged in order of height

Introduction

Here, within a short distance of Scotland's greatest conurbation, are eight fascinating and diverse islands. Turn left on the Clyde at Cloch Point and travel 'doon the watter' to Bute, guard of the western entrance, with Inchmarnock tucked behind it. The eastern sentinels are the Cumbraes, Great and Little. Ahead and beyond, the towering serrated ridge of Arran dominates the entire Firth, dwarfing even the high peak of Holy Island. Further out, lonely and conspicuous in the southern reaches of the Firth, stands Ailsa Craig – familiarly referred to as Paddy's Milestone and on the horizon, a speck at the foot of the Mull of Kintyre, is mysterious Sanda Island.

This area, with its long sea-lochs, offers a marvellous environment for inshore sailing. The longest of these lochs – longer than Loch Long – is Loch Fyne, stretching from the north of Arran to well beyond Inveraray. The fishing town of Tarbert is the main port on this loch and source of the world-famous Loch Fyne kippers. The larger 'islands' in the vicinity, Barmore and Eilean Aoidhe, are in fact peninsulas and the only islets possibly worthy of the name are **Eilean Buidhe** and **Eilean a' Bhuic** opposite Tarbert and **Eilean a' Chromhraig** just south of the entrance.

Halfway up the loch in Loch Gilp is **Duncuan Island** with, to the east of it, another drying island – Eilean Mór. However, alongside Eilean Mór is the strip of **Liath Eilean** with a pleasant anchorage in between.

In the upper reaches there is **Glas Eilean** off Port Ann with **Eilean Aoghainn** in the centre of the loch and overlooked by Minard Castle.

The islets of the Kilbrannan Sound are equally insignificant – two tiny islets on the coast of the Mull of Kintyre – **Thorn Isle** and **Island Ross**. **Davaar**, which guards the entrance to Campbeltown Loch and issues its own postage stamps, is not by definition a true island as it can be reached at low water over a shingle causeway (dangerous when the tide comes in). It is worth a visit because there are seven caves and the fifth conceals a famous mural of Christ crucified which was painted in secret by a local artist, Alexander MacKinnon in 1887.

On the Ayrshire coast by Ardrossan harbour five species of gull nest on low-lying **Horse Island** and, likewise, colonies of common, sandwich and arctic tern nest on **Lady Isle** off Troon. There are no other islets on this coast and the Solway Firth is also short of islands. The largest group is at Fleet Bay – **Murray's Isles**, **Ardwall Island** and **Barlocco Island**. At Kirkcudbright Bay **Little Ross** is off the Ross headland and **Hestan Island** is in the centre of shallow, tidal Auchencairn Bay. Little Ross supports a Stevenson lighthouse which has been automatic since 1961. Two lighthouse-keepers' houses are owned by Dr S R Wild of Edinburgh. The islet was the scene of a nasty murder in 1960: but that's another story.

1.1 Ailsa Craig

(G. aillse creag – fairy rock). Referred to locally as Paddy's Milestone but sometimes known as creag Ealasaid (G. – Elizabeth's rock). In the old Irish tale of 'Buioe Suibne' it is called carraig Alastair (G. – Alastair's rock).

OS Maps: 1:50000 Sheet 76 1:25000 Sheet 326 1:10000 (NX 09)
Admiralty Chart: 1:75000 No.2126

Area: 99ha (245 acres)
Height: 338m (1109 ft)

Owner: Sold by Cassilis Estates (Marquess of Ailsa) in 2013 for a reputed £1.5 million. The lighthouse property with four houses is owned by Bobby Sandhu.

Population: From 19th century to mid-20th century a small population of quarrymen and families. 1881–29. 1891–27. 1931–11. 1961–10. 1971–3 (lighthouse keepers). 1981–2. 1991–0 (lighthouse automatic). 2011–0.

Geology: Mainly an acid igneous rock containing fine-grained crystals of quartz, mica and feldspar, known as microgranite. In the north-east there is a seam of reibickite, a particularly fine-grained micro-granite, from which 70% of the world's curling stones are made. These were cut on the island and polished on the mainland, but the quarries are now mostly disused even for building stone. The floor of the Chapel of the Thistle in St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, is made of this beautiful Ailsa Craig granite. Much of the island is columnar basalt, sometimes forming columns 120 metres (400ft) in height.

AILSA CRAIG FROM DUNURE CASTLE, SEAT OF THE KENNEDYS

History: An old square peel-tower on the island was almost certainly built by the Hamiltons to prevent Phillip II of Spain taking the island in support of the Catholics during the Reformation.

The lighthouse was built in 1868 by the Stevensons.

Wildlife: In 2004 the island became an RSPB Reserve by invitation of the Marquess. It was already a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a European Special Protection Area.

At one time some Soay sheep from St Kilda (neolithic, dark-brown, small and hardy) were bred here. Rabbits were said to have been brought in by the quarrymen to supplement their diet. These have not been as big a problem, however, as the brown rats which arrived in 1889 when ships were ferrying materials and supplies to the newly built lighthouse. (The quarrymen later claimed that the rats and rabbits were interbreeding!)

Before the brown rats moved in there were at least 250,000 pairs of puffins on the island. An ornithologist, Robert Gray, reported in the 1860s that when he disturbed the puffins 'for a time their numbers seemed so great as to cause a bewildering darkness.'

By 1990 the rats had successfully driven many birds off the island and not a single puffin had been seen since 1984. So in 1991 a rat eradication programme was instituted by the Marquess of Ailsa, Glasgow University and Scottish Natural Heritage. Poison to kill the rats, three tons of Warfarin, was airlifted by helicopter from *HMS Gannet*, Prestwick, and distributed on the island in the Spring. 'Some of it was put in bait boxes and a lot went straight into the rat holes,' said Dr Zonfrillo, a leading ornithologist member of the working group. The rats died in their burrows so there were no rat carcasses strewn about. The treatment seems to have worked and it has also (temporarily?) reduced the rabbit population.

By 1996 black guillemots and shelduck had returned to nest and occasional puffins had been seen, but it was not until 2002 that it was certain that a few puffins had at last established nest-burrows on the island and started breeding again.

Ailsa Craig is noted for its immense gannet colony which has been there since at least 1526. Recently nearly 40,000 breeding pairs of gannets were reported which is about 5% of the gannet population of the world. They are mainly on the south-west side. Numerous guillemots, kittiwakes and gulls are also to be found and blackbirds, song-thrushes, wheatears and willow warblers have been seen. Pipits may be found on the steep slopes above the smooth rock walls.

The island's slow worms, which hide under the rocks, are considered the largest in Europe and there is a wide variety of plant life. In places the cliffs are white with the scented flowers of scurvy grass spotted here and there with red lychnis. The rose-coloured flowers of the tree mallow, *Lavatera arborea*, can be seen growing 2–3m high near the buildings but warmer weather is now unfortunately encouraging this plant to spread across the island and block the puffins' nesting holes (See Bass Rock, Section 12-Appendix).

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AILSA CRAIG is the Lowlands' answer to the Hebridean and Orcadian stacks, those great chunks of rock rearing out of the sea. Its basalt and columnar trap rises abruptly from sea level and soars to a height of nearly 340m – over 1100 feet. When its ethereal shape materialises out of the mist one can understand it being

THE JETTY ON AILSA CRAIG

named fairy rock by some ancient Celt. Except on the east side which has an accessible slope it is so precipitous that even the seabirds are unable to nest on some of the cliffs. Wordsworth and Keats were impressed by it, but Burns' only comment (in 'Duncan Gray') was that 'Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig'!

Twenty-five thousand years ago when Scotland lay smothered under a thick sheet of ice a glacier flowing down the Clyde valley broke off pieces of Ailsa Craig granite and carried them south to the English Midlands where they still lie around today scattered between Wales and the Pennines. Much more recently the same fine-grained granite was again distributed widely, but this time in the form of curling stones. For many years there was no other source.

An old anchor bedded in the pebble beach by the broken jetty marks the path to the group of buildings clustered round the lighthouse.

A rusty narrow-gauge railway line runs from the pier and past the quarrymen's cottages to the abandoned quarry on the south side. A forge and disused foghorns are also in evidence and there are heaps of waste granite pieces from which the spheroidal curling stones have been cut leaving fascinating shapes like miniature Henry Moore sculptures. I am told the heaps are dwindling as the offcuts are being sold as curios. The Andrew Kay company still has the sole quarrying rights on Ailsa Craig.

A well-defined zig-zag path climbs to the top, starting near the lighthouse and passing the old square **peel-tower** about 100m up the slope [NX023995]. The three stars of the Hamilton coat of arms are carved on a stone set in the walls.

Further up, the path passes over the shallow valley of Garraloo and beside the tiny **Garra Loch** with the cleft of Rotten Nick below before making its way to the top. Here the precipice plunges straight to the sea; **Bare Stack**, in the north-west, with two ferocious brown overhangs and **Ashydoo** cliff lying just south. Far below to the south-west is Spot of Grass, Doras Yett and the outcrop of Kennedy's Nags. And beyond the white lace of the surf lie the wide stretches of the Firth of Clyde with the long dark shape of Ulster on the south-western horizon.

It is possible to make an exciting and relatively easy two-mile circumnavigation of the island beneath these cliffs. The only minor obstruction is at **Water Cave** in the south-west cleft. The exposed corner of Stranny Point has to be negotiated to reach this mini Fingal's Cave when coming from the east around the shore, past **Little Ailsa**. Try and time it for low water.

Climbers may prefer to go directly up the slope from the landing place on the east shore. There is no difficulty in the ascent but in places the route leads over steeply inclined slabs. No rock-climbing routes on any of the dramatic cliffs have been recorded but this is just as well as the island is a bird-sanctuary.

* * *

Access: Crossing time approx. 1 hour. Boat trips from Girvan by arrangement, Mark McCrindle, 01465-713219 or ASW Charters *Rachel Clare*, 01465-715934.

Anchorage:
1. A deteriorating timber jetty or pier in the north-east beside the lighthouse at Foreland Point has only 0.6m at its head. Temp anchorage possible close N of jetty but beware remains of an older jetty close NW of existing jetty. Bottom of granite boulders shelves steeply. Use tripping line and do not leave craft unattended.

1.2 Sanda Island

(ON. sandtange – sand spit) island. There is a large sand spit near the harbour called Oitir Buidhe (G. – yellow sand spit). According to the Ordnance Gazetteer Sanda was called 'Avona Porticosa' by the Vikings and known as 'Aven' in Gaelic (?G. abhainn – river). But Dean Munro says the Danes called it 'Havin', i.e. anchorage – which makes much more sense.

OS Maps: 1:50000 Sheet 68 1:25000 Sheet 356
Admiralty Charts: 1:75000 Nos. 2126 or 2199

Area: 127ha (314 acres)
Height: 123m (403 ft)

Owner: Former owners were, 1969, Jack Bruce of the band Cream and, 1976, James Gulliver. Bought in 1989 by Dick and Meg Gannon for a reported £250,000 including the Barony title. Marketed at £3.2 million but sold to Swiss millionaire Mr Michi Meir for a reported £1.2 million in 2010.

Population: 1841–11 (1 house). 1871–32. 1881–14. 1891–36 (7 houses). 1931–14. 1961–7. 1981–0. 1991–0. 2011–1.

Geology: Lower Old Red Sandstone in red and yellow varieties, and undifferentiated schists.

History: In 1306 Bruce may have landed here. Angus II, fifth King of the Isles, sheltered him at Dunaverty Castle which stood on the headland at Southend overlooking Sanda Island [NR688076]. When the English fleet drew closer he slipped away to Ireland.

The end of the lighthouse promontory on the south of the island is called Prince Edward's Rock after Edward Bruce, Robert the Bruce's impulsive brother, who was, very briefly, King of Ireland.

At this time Sanda was part of the lands of the Priory of Whithorn in Galloway and remained so until the late 16th century, when it became the property of the MacDonalds of Sanda with the Earl of Argyll holding the superiority.

In 1647, Dunaverty Castle again entered the history books when 300 MacDonalds of Kintyre, Catholic royalists and supporters of Montrose, made their last stand against the Covenanter general, Leslie. Among them were Archibald Mor, chief of the MacDonalds of Sanda and his son and heir Archibald Og. Sir Alexander MacDonald had left them to defend the castle when he withdrew to Ireland but they were besieged and short of drinking water. Leslie offered to spare them should they surrender. They did so whereupon he had every one of them massacred. The castle was razed to the ground, never rebuilt, and from then on it has been known as Bloody Castle.

The MacDonalds' estates were forfeited but in 1661 they were restored by Act of Parliament. Ronald MacDonald inherited Sanda but died in 1679 when his son, Archibald, became the 6th Laird of Sanda.

In 1946 the Campbeltown lifeboat *The Duke of Connaught* (brought out of retirement as the new boat was under repair) went to the assistance

of the 7000-ton *Byron Darnton* stuck on a reef on the south of Sanda. The skipper of the wrecked ship apparently considered it safer to stay aboard and keep below decks, but the lifeboatmen knew that the ship was bound to break up before long with the almost inevitable death of everyone on board. Unfortunately the old lifeboat had no radio. Conditions were appalling and communication with the ship was impossible as no one was on deck so the lifeboat sailed back round the island to the north harbour, where one of the crew ran overland to the south side. There was a radio transmitter at the lighthouse by which he eventually persuaded the captain of the stricken ship to allow those aboard to be taken off. Once again the lifeboat set out into the violent storm, rounded the island, and in spite of a very unreliable engine risked going into the chaotic sea among the rocks. It took eighteen long hours of almost foolhardy bravery but all fifty-four passengers and crew (and even a dog) were saved. Just as the lifeboat pulled clear of the rocks the ship finally disintegrated. But all was not over for while struggling home the old engine at last sputtered out. It seemed a losing battle as they were blown out to sea but after an hour they coaxed her into life again and at last reached the safety of the harbour.

'THE SHIP' LIGHTHOUSE, SANDA

Wildlife: Two of Sanda's small neighbouring islands, Sheep Island and Glunimore Island, are important breeding grounds for puffins in the Clyde area but many seabirds also breed on Sanda Island's crags. The converted boatshed is a visitors' centre.

* * *

Although **SANDA ISLAND** is a useful stopping-off point for a yacht waiting for the tide to round the Mull of Kintyre the present owner 'banned' all visitors, following a barn fire in 2010. The farmhouse, which was restored by the previous owner for his own occupation, is just beside the jetty and slipway. There is also an old schoolhouse and various farm buildings which he converted in 2003 for letting as holiday cottages and as a popular licensed restaurant, the Byron Darnton tavern. Sanda is a Site of Scientific Interest (SSI) and also an RSPB Reserve since 2005 and the Nature Conservancy Council have the seabirds monitored and ringed both on Sanda and on its two little neighbours, **Sheep Island** and **Glunimore Island**. Glunimore is a tiny lump of rock but Sheep Island is large enough to provide some grazing for sheep. It has a cave on it and a natural stone arch at its north end.

The road which runs round the bay and across the island to the lighthouse had been macadamed in the past and there are still patches of tar lying in the ruts. The roofless ruin of little **St Ninian's Chapel**, about 10.3m by 6.3m, is on the south side of a knoll within the burial enclosure [NR727046]. Fordun noted this building in the second half of the 14th century. The side walls, of local rubble dressed with local sandstone, are still standing to roof level, but the gables have partly collapsed. There is an intact wooden lintel over the entrance doorway. One of the three window embrasures is still in reasonable condition and it has a stone basin or piscina set in the wall beside it. A matching basin has not been seen since 1873. There is a stone altar slab with a rectangular slot in it – possibly used for relics and an inscription on a grave slab set in the floor refers to 'Archibald – son to MacDonald of Sanda' and 'Cirstin Stewart'. Cirstin Stewart was the widow of Archibald Mor MacDonald who died in the Dunaverty Massacre.

By the north-west corner of the chapel a worn Early Christian slab is incised with a cross and near the centre of the burial ground there is a large much-eroded cruciform-shaped stone nearly 2m high and a few scattered headstones. Heraldic memorials to the MacDonald lairds show that Archibald, the sixth laird, was alive in 1731.

Just west of the chapel are the footings of a small square structure. A 1630 record states – 'at the syde of that Chappell there is a litle well or compass of stones. . . And they say that the bones of certaine holie men that lived in that Illand is buried within that place.' The same record also refers to a 'spring of fresh water called St Ninian's Well' which had therapeutic powers but this has not been identified.

In the past there was an active fishing community living on Sanda. Apparently, by tradition, if there was a severe storm and the men were still at sea, the families would gather in the burial ground by a particular unmarked grave, say a prayer for the fishermen, and then solemnly pour a cup of fresh water on the grave. The origin of this ceremony is unknown.

Legend has it that St Ninian himself is buried on Sanda and that anyone who steps on his grave will die within a year. This dangerous spot once had an alder tree marking its whereabouts but that has long since disappeared.

The island had not been farmed since 1946 but after 1989 the Gannons worked hard repairing the fences and stocking the farm with sheep and poultry. There are no trees but this was not always the case; the hill above the farmhouse is still called Wood Hill. The lighthouse, on a promontory on the south shore (called **The Ship** because it has that appearance from the sea), was built in 1850 by Alan Stevenson and altered in 1881. The skerries here are littered with the wrecks of ships. There is a striking wide-span natural stone arch alongside the lighthouse and many cave-riddled crags and rock formations in the vicinity. On a sunny summer day there are few more enjoyable experiences than a walk across Sanda. The central valley traps the heat as it is sheltered from all the prevailing winds.

* * *

Access: Kintyre Marine Charters sails from the Old Quay, Campbeltown, Kintyre (01586-554667) daily throughout the summer, weather (and owners) permitting.
From Girvan, ASW Charters. 01465-715934.

Anchorages:
1. Off Sanda Roads just NE of slipway/jetty, 4–5m, sand. Strong nearby tidal stream requires care. On W side of anchorage a reef extends about ¾c N from Beinn a Theine marked by a perch. Note sunken rocks in centre of the Roads. Some swell likely but well-protected from SW.
2. South Bay, small bight on S side of Sanda. Temporary anchorage and shelter from NW winds about 3c ENE of The Ship light-tower. Rocks dry up to 2.5c E of SW point of the lighthouse promontory.

1.3 Holy Island

First noted as Inis Stroin, later as eilean Molaise (G. – Mo Las' island) corrupted to Lamlash. Also known as Holy Island which became its official name in 1830 when the township on Arran adopted the name of Lamlash.

OS Maps: 1:50000 Sheet 69 1:25000 Sheet 361
Admiralty Charts: 1:20000 No.1864

Area: 253ha (625 acres)
Height: 314m (1030 ft)

Owner: At one time part of the estates of the Duke of Hamilton. Bought in 1991 by a group of Scottish Buddhists, the Samyé Ling Buddhist Centre, for about £350,000 from Mrs Catherine Morris. The price was agreed on the understanding that there would be no commercial exploitation and that the archaeological and spiritual amenities, and the distinctive flora and fauna would be protected.

Population: 1841–no separate record. 1881–15. 1891–16 (3 houses). 1931–19. 1961–7. 1971–10. (These figures include the lighthouse keepers.) 1981–0. 1991–0. 2001–13. 2011–31.
A Buddhists community.

Geology: Mainly igneous rock of a rhyolite type in the north and basalt in the south. The steep patches on the west slopes are of porphyry and claystone.

History: The island's one-time resident and patron saint, St Mo Las, was born in Ireland in 566 AD, became bishop of Leighlin, Ireland c.610 and may have died c.640.

In the 12th century Somerled established a monastery on the island and it was visited by King Haakon's Norsemen before and probably also after the Battle of Largs in 1263.

In 1548 the ship carrying the five-year-old child who was to become Mary Queen of Scots sheltered here on its way to France.

Wildlife: The island is a nature reserve. It was once covered with trees and the present owners, following their passionate interest in the environment, have already planted more than