Clyde Branch pelagic trip to: Ailsa Craig
Sunday October 18th 0900-1730

www.lochryanleisure.co.uk **and**

Outing leader: John Simpson
Participants: 11
Weather: Overcast skies and a light swell.

The trip departed Girvan at 0900hrs with overcast skies and a light swell on the Clyde. A full boat of eleven Clyde Branch members attended. We left in the knowledge that we were heading out a little late in the season. Such has been the effects of this autumn's weather.

Our skipper Stevie got us out to Ailsa Craig and on arrival we have excellent views of our first Minke Whale. The Minke was feeding in the relatively deep shoreline waters and was framed nicely against the backdrop of the rock. A scan of the shoreline found several Grey and Harbour Seal pups with attentive mothers.

Minke Whale © John Simpson

We hoped to land on Ailsa but with an increasing swell we had to pass and head on for a circumnavigation of the island. We encountered several feeding frenzies of Gannets which incorporated Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes.

On arriving on the imposing west side of the island a female Peregrine was noted. This complemented the Buzzard and pair of Ravens soaring over the Craig. To everyone's surprise, there was still considerable activity at the gannet colony. Immature birds were seen still sitting on nests with many fledged on the sea.

Gannet © John Dryden

We sailed out a few miles beyond Ailsa Craig checking feeding frenzies and rafting birds as we went. It was self-evident that the shearwaters and Puffins had departed. The weather was improving with blue skies, sunshine and a much-reduced swell.

To everyone's delight, the conditions were perfect for landing on Ailsa and Stevie made a second successful attempt. With two and a half hours ashore, it was a wonderful opportunity to wander this iconic island. For many it was the first time on Ailsa Craig and for others, it's been many decades since they last visited. The lighthouse is closed and the remaining buildings are now derelict. That includes the cottage that acted as a field station. Bernie Zonfrillo used the cottage as a base during his successful rat eradication programme. The SOC window sticker was still proudly in place. Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Wren, Stonechat and Rock Pipit were all recorded.

Outing group photo © John Simpson

We all enjoyed the seal activity which included many safe and responsible close ups of pups and ‘singing’ adults. Another Minke Whale was spotted offshore to round off the experience. The scenery was absolutely stunning.

Grey Seal pup © John Simpson

On our way back we encountered yet another Minke Whale. Just after, we all had the experience of a pod of Common Dolphins bow riding the boat. News broke of an excellent count of Black-throated, Red-throated and Great northern Divers off Dipple, just north of Girvan. We made the detour and were not disappointed. We had good views before heading back to Girvan, returning to the harbour at 1730hrs. Overall, we saw 40 species on the trip.

In Steve Stringer our skipper, we’ve found someone we can work with and look forward to many more trips in the future. Bookings will be made for May, June, July, August and September.
We all reflected on seeing some great birds, great scenery and enjoyed great company. Here’s to when we sail again…

John Simpson, October 2026

West side of Ailsa Craig © John Dryden