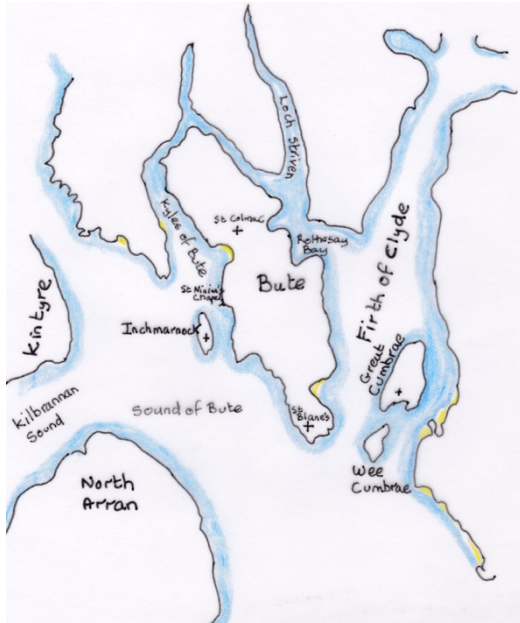


## St Blane's, Bute: an uphill way



Bute, is situated 'doon the watter' from Glasgow. Its main town, east-coast located Rotherisay, becoming a popular tourist destination for day-trippers and

holiday-makers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within Bute's southern hilly spur lies St Blane's.

I first visited in May 2007. A path drew me through a gentle meadow, then up a steeper rise. My climb was accompanied by the sound of the summer lark ascending, a fluttering, invisible cadence calling me to the summit, *creag nan uiseag*, the hill where the lark sings. I paused for a breath, before a final push, rising, rising, until the slope levelled out, revealing a ruin-clad plateau.

St Blane's lies in a hillside hollow within the semi-shelter of wooded hills to the north, and fine views south, across the Sound of Bute to Arran and beyond. An earth-walled vallum, bounded the outer secular world from the inner spiritual world. An age-old breach point between earth and heaven, soil and sanctuary, present and eternity.



The summit is dominated by the remains of the 12<sup>th</sup> century church of St Blane's, possibly set over the original church.



Scattered around are a Viking hogback grave and some early medieval disc-head slabs. Some stones with interlace and animal motifs are now in Bute's Museum.

I sat, unpacked my lunch, and pondered, wondering in whose footsteps I'd trodden and the songs they sang...

21<sup>st</sup> century Bute worshippers who come annually to celebrate as Easter dawns,

500 years earlier, mourners bearing a loved one to a final place of sacred rest,

500 years earlier again, Norse, burying a leader who'd embraced the Christian faith,

500 years earlier again, Catan and his nephew Blane, first and successor abbots.

My mind wandered 500 years further back again, for anyone journeying up to St Blane's sacred hollow, would have been in step with Jesus on Palm Sunday as he walked up into Jerusalem to the Temple.



Uphill journeys can offer stunning vistas, but they can also be testing and traumatic.

Just now it feels as if our nation lies in the foothills of trauma. But by embracing the songs of the saints, as well as following in their steps, light and hope may be found:

I lift my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Psalm 121