

**Transcript**  
**Wild for Scotland Podcast**  
**Season 4, Episode 1: 'Traces' - The Isle of Kerrera**  
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**Part of Tremula Network**

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[pre-roll ads]

Before we get started, let me tell you about our Wild for Scotland Listener Survey. We'd love to hear from you to find out what you like about the show and what we can improve on to make this podcast even better. It only takes a few minutes to fill in the survey, so follow the link in the show notes and don't forget to leave your name and email address to enter the price draw at the end! Thank you so much!

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This podcast is part of the Tremula Network, adventure and outdoor podcasts off the beaten track. To find out more head to [tremula.network](https://tremula.network) or find us on socials.

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[main theme tune]

Hello there and welcome to Wild for Scotland,  
  
a podcast full of inspiring stories from Scotland.

I'm your host, Kathi Kamleitner.

Wild for Scotland helps you connect with Scotland  
and dream about future adventures.

I'll tell you immersive stories to whisk you away,  
Share some of my top tips for your own Scotland trip,  
And introduce you to inspiring locals and their stories.

So, lean back and enjoy -  
Let's travel to Scotland!

[main theme tune end]

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Welcome to season 4 of Wild for Scotland!

I hope you've had a good year so far. We spent the summer researching, writing and recording new episodes and I'm excited that it's finally time to share them with you.

Much like earlier this year, I will be telling you immersive stories from some of my favourite places to visit, and also share with you conversations I've had with the people who inspired them.

We're going far back into the earliest history of Scotland, visit far away islands, climb high into the towering mountains of the Highlands and dive down below its surface to experience its dazzling underwater world.

Today, our journey takes us on a boat and across a narrow channel to the Isle of Kerrera, one of the many islands at the doorstep of Oban. I'm joined by Fran Turauskis, who you know as the producer and editor of the show, and Kirsty Pallas, a mountain guide who is passionate about the hidden gems of Argyll.

Our initial plan to scale a mountain together went out the window as soon as we checked the weather forecast. And even though it stayed dry in the end, the clouds were hanging low and the hill tops shrouded in a thick mist. We wouldn't have seen a thing.

And that's when Kirsty suggested heading to Kerrera instead. A small island off the coast of Oban, a place neither Fran nor I had ever been to, and as it turns out, a perfect destination for a little adventure.

This is 'Traces'.

[jingle]

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I watch as the small ferry lowers [people talking in the background] its ramp and slides up the slipway. A man in a high-vis jacket unclips the rope and directs a handful of passengers back to firm ground. The line in front of me starts moving and one by one, I watch the people board the ferry. There is a group of even Spanish tourists, two couples with dogs, and then there's Kirsty, who's suggested to take us on this adventure. And that's all the people the boat can fit for now - we have to wait for the next turn.

Luckily, the boat does not have far to go. I can clearly see the slipway on the other side of the channel and watch the boat move in its direction. It's an open ferry. The small cabin is there for the skipper and the ticket officer, but the passengers have to stand outside on the platform.

I watch as tiny figures spill off the boat and onto the island in the distance. A few minutes later, the ferry is back on its way, and we're next in line. [people talking and boat sounds] From the water I can spot the Victorian promenade of Oban to the north. And even though I have been to Oban many times, this is my first time venturing across the narrow sound to the island whose outline has become a familiar sight from the harbour and the promenade.

The island is best known for its dramatic castle on the south coast and the bustling Marina at the north end. The Isle of Kerrera, a jewel in the Firth of Lorne. The island is best known for its dramatic castle on the south coast and the bustling marina at the north end.

The journey across takes about five minutes. [boat sounds could go until here] Off the boat, we reunite with Kirsty, and while Fran and I still admire the view, Kirsty is lending a hand to the post lady Gill, carrying parcels from the slipway to her quad bike.

Kerrera is home to about 70 people. The island is privately owned, but the development trust run by the locals is in charge of many projects that create new opportunities for the community. Gill tells us about the new road that was just finished and connects the north and the south of the island for the first time. There is a newly planted community woodland, and the dilapidated Old Schoolhouse is being turned into a community centre.

It's easy to see only the romance of island life, especially when you visit for a day. But like other small islands off the coast of Scotland, Kerrera is **home** to the people who live there. Life is just a little different.

Once Gill's quad bike is all loaded up, we set out for our walk. There are two walking routes on Kerrera. One explores the north and heads to the marina and the Hutcheson's Memorial. But we take the southern route, a circular walk that takes you to Lower Gylen and the island's tea garden.

From the ferry point the track leads along the shores of Horseshoe Bay. Flora Macdonald was held prisoner here for helping the escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie after his Jacobite Army was defeated at Culloden. Hundreds of years earlier, King Alexander II of Scotland planned an invasion here to reclaim the Hebridean islands and free them from Norwegian rule. But that plan was doomed by a vision and the king died on the island.

Today, the landscape is significantly more peaceful. Farming is an important part of the local community, and sheep roam the meadows between the sea and the track. The ewes have been shorn, their bony heads seem out of proportion with their slim bodies. The lambs, on the other hand, with their thick coats, are almost as big as their mothers. But they still rely on their direction, jumping up in a panic by our mere sight, huddling fearful behind them. A dog barks on the path behind us, and off they go, running gracefully across the rocky beach, hiding from sight in the tall bracken.

A little further, we reach Little Horseshoe Bay. Islanders were not necessarily the most creative at naming features in the landscape... Place names can encapsulate entire stories in a few words, but sometimes names are simply that - descriptors inspired by what's seen in the landscape. A horseshoe-shaped bay that is smaller than the one we walked past before.

Here, Kerrera made history by becoming the first island to be linked to the telephone network, and subsequently being the first landing point of the transatlantic telephone cable that stretched from here to Newfoundland. There is a boulder by the side of the track with a commemorative plaque.

Kirsty tells us another story, one that isn't about a historic event or long-lasting magnitude, but it's a story that left its traces in her mind on Kerrera, nevertheless.

[insert parrot story recording]

KP: It's a really cool little place. Yeah. So this place up here, this end cottage, used to be a parrot sanctuary. [Kathi Laughs] And when you came along, you get to about here and erm, oh there was just like so much noise from all the parrots, but it wouldn't, it'd be like some squawking and stuff, but they'd also be like phones ringing and alarms going off and stuff just with them mimicking [KK: Yeah], whatever they'd picked up [KK: Oh that is so funny] are like just them chatting, as well. So that was always good fun to walk past, erm.- Fades out.

We pass through a gate. [creaky gate sound] A teapot at the top of one of the posts announces that we're halfway to the tea garden, but Kirsty turns left and takes us through tall grass to the edge of the bay. [walking on gravel ground starts] Here lies the wreck of the Diamond, a small ship that was used to transport tobacco between Oban and the Caribbean.

Its wooden hull is slowly decaying, exposed to the elements. The paint is still visible, but flaking off the splintering wood. {walking sounds fade out} Ribs exposed, planks peeling off. Rusty bits of metal hold the structure together. It's low tide and we can see logs beneath the keel and I guess they were used to haul the ship up the beach.

The deck is crumbling. Cushions of grass are growing near the top, where the water of the high tide won't reach. I can see doorways below deck, and the remainders of masts. Near the stern, a small rowan tree is braving the elements. The rowan is a hardy tree. I've seen them grow on little to no soil, in the cracks of boulders and up at high altitudes. It was once seen as a protector from evil spirits and enchantments, and cutting a rowan - that was just something you wouldn't dare.

From the bay, we make our way up a little knoll, a small, rocky hill that emerges from the bracken.

As we walk up the steep, pathless slope, I can feel rocks beneath my feet, covered by a layer of soil and grass, but still tangible below the surface. Their presence is a reminder of the human history of Kerrera that stretches back thousands of years ago. Traces of the past.

The top of the hill is flat like a table top. Around the edges, you can clearly see the base of the stone wall that once provided shelter and protection. The rocks we felt on the slopes were once part of these tumbled walls, all that is left of this Iron Age hill fort.

Across the sound, Kirsty points out a similar hill with a flattened top. Another fort, offering a secure home and a perfect lookout on anyone who travelled up or down the channel.

Below it sits a pretty 18th-century castle on land owned by the Clan MacDougall, a recent addition, in comparison.

We exit the hill fort through a gap in the stone wall, the remains of a gate. A small track takes us down the grassy gully. Past trees on whose trunks we see succulent mushrooms, and back onto the track leading south.

We pass two more teapots, one hanging high in the trees,[walking sounds start] another perched on a fence post, and a few minutes later, the source comes into view.

[Group talking and walking sounds]

The Kerrera Tea Garden is preceded by its reputation. I had heard about it long before I ever knew anything else about the island, and my dream to visit one day was formed there and then.

We order hot soup and grab the last table out in the garden. As we eat, silence sets in, apart from the continuous bleating of sheep and the distance crashing of waves against the shore. We can see the edge of the island from here and one by one, groups of hikers peel off their tables and start making their way on the grassy path towards it.

Surprised we watch as a peacock family emerges from behind the barn. A dazzling male with iridescently blue and green feathers, and an equally majestic female, with muted brown colours, but carrying herself with grace. And around them are their chicks. Six or seven fluffy bundles, pecking away on the ground under the watchful eyes of their parents. They're tiny in comparison and well camouflaged on the ground, but they already have a crown of feathers on the top of their heads. Proud peacocks in the making.

Writing a new story of exotic birds on the island.

Well rested and filled with new energy, we do as our predecessors and follow the track to the coast. It runs past a stream, bends around a corner and soon the dramatic ruins of Gylen Castle come into view.

Perched on a rock that is surrounded by water from three sides, it towers over a rocky headland. A shallow bay extends to the west. And we see the tiny silhouettes of people walking across the back of the hill leading towards the lonely tower.

On the horizon, we can see a string of islands - Seil and Insh, and beyond it, the rounded backs of Lunga and Scarba. Far away in the distance, surrounded by a veil of white light, we see Colonsay, the Paps of Jura are somewhere hiding in the distance and neighbouring Mull dominates our view to the west.

As remote as Gylen Castle seems to us today, to seafaring folks of the Hebrides, it was at the centre of the world. Surrounded by islands, guarding the seas and access to the mainland. A stronghold of the MacDougalls, who built it in 1582. It was occupied only for 65 years, before it was set ablaze after a siege by the English-backed Covenanters.

The roof was never restored and the castle has lain empty ever since. One day I am sure, the walls that remain will tumble down the steep slopes, and become grass-covered rocks on a flattened hilltop, the only traces of a turbulent past.

We climb up to the castle. Even though the fire had made it inhabitable, it's easy to fill in the gaps of tumbled rocks. It's an impressive tower house, even in this state. We can see the ornate, crumbled features on the facade, carved stones holding up the gable ends. An oriel window protrudes from the third floor. [walking up wooden stairs noise] Inside, we walk up a spiral staircase to the first floor. There is a giant fireplace on this level, and above it we can see smaller ones on the levels above. But apart from that, only the outer walls remain and we look up into the dull sky above us.

[Sea sounds]

KK: Wow, this is so cool.

KP: You can see if you look up the turret that's like where the stairs would have continued up.

KK: Yeah

KK: Does that go all the way can you see

KP: Yeah, yeah, you can see up

KK: Huh, that is so cool.

[Fades out]

From the castle, we make our way down to the bays in the east.

[sound effects - walking, waves, pebbles rattling in the waves]

Waves are rolling in, relentlessly without a pause, as we carefully manoeuvre over slippery rocks. We listen to the sounds of water washing over rounded pebbles, and pebbles rattling as the retrieving sea pulls them towards it.

We find empty oysters and scallop shells among the rocks, a shark's discarded egg case and rocks with patterns of white quartz and lichen, painting unusual shapes on grey canvas.

[sounds fade out]

Instead of returning the same way we came, Kirsty leads us up into the hills. We stay on high ground, avoiding the bracken and startling a few sheep, until we reach a fence.

'There's a gate here somewhere,' Kirsty says after consulting her map, but we look for it without success. Instead, we find a gap in the fence, where a post has fallen over, and the barbed wire is close enough to the ground to step over. Carefully.

A wee scramble later, we're back on the gravel track that leads us up to the ferry. Once again we join the line of gathered island hoppers and wait for our turn on the boat. From the

water, I look back to the little hump of land that was once not more than a familiar sight on the horizon, and will now forever leave its traces in my mind.

[jingle]

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I hope you enjoyed this story about the Isle of Kerrera. We only covered about half of the southern route trail, so there is a lot more to see and discover on the island.

In this week's newsletter I'm sharing a few useful resources to help you plan a longer walk across the island and some tips to make it an enjoyable day out.

You can sign up via the link in the show notes.

Now, let's take a quick detour and hear a story about our sponsors.

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[ad break]

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Hello Wild for Scotland listeners! My name is Fran Turauskis and you know me as the co-producer of Wild for Scotland. But I'm here to tell you about another podcast in the Tremula Network.

On the Outside is for anyone who spends their time outdoors in the UK and wants to engage in the wider outdoor community. Each episode you'll hear a diverse range of enthusiasts and experts talking about the news stories that matter to them.

We look at everything from specific sports news to the social issues and events that shape the way we experience the outdoors. In previous episodes we've talked about Southern Water dumping sewage into our seas, a racist stunt on Ben Nevis and whether climbing gyms should ban topless climbing.

So if you want to hear conversations and opinions on what's happening outside, search for On the Outside in your podcast app or head to [ontheoutsidepodcast.co.uk](https://ontheoutsidepodcast.co.uk).

[clapping jingle]

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And we're back. Now, it's time for the practical part of the show. Here are five travel tips for a trip to the Isle of Kerrera.

Tip Number 1) Arrive early

The car park at the ferry slipway is relatively small and finding a spot can be an issue. I recommend you aim for an early ferry to increase your chances on a parking spot and to allow you plenty of time on the island.

Alternatively, you can cycle or walk to the ferry from Oban, or catch a local bus. It's about two miles along the road from the train station in Oban to the Kerrera ferry.

#### Tip Number 2) Stop at the Kerrera Tea Garden

We had initially considered bringing our own lunch pack on our hike, but once we decided to go to Kerrera, we knew we had to eat at the Tea Garden instead - and I'm so glad we did. Not only was the food delicious, it's also good to support local businesses, especially when you visit island communities. The prices are reasonable and as a nice surprise, the Tea Garden now even accepts card payments.

#### Tip Number 3) Get the visitor guide on the ferry

It's easy to visit a small island like Kerrera and walk right past some of its most significant historic sites because they're not signposted. The Iron Age fort we explored with Kirsty is a prime example of this. For such a small island there is a lot to see! I picked up the Kerrera visitor guide at the ferry which tells you more about the history of the island and sites of interest. It also contains a map and descriptions of the two main walking routes around the island.

#### Tip Number 4) Hire a local guide

Nothing beats the expertise of a local guide. Kirsty Pallas, who accompanied us on this day trip, is a mountain guide who lives near Oban and knows Kerrera really well. She took us to places we would have otherwise missed and told us lots of stories about the island. Even though the route isn't hard or technically challenging, it was still amazing to have an experienced guide with us to offer guidance and context.

#### Tip Number 5) Stay a little while longer

There are no B&Bs or hotels on the island, but there are two self-catering cottages - one at Horseshoe Bay near the ferry, and one in Ardintrave on the north end, or you can hire the bunkhouse by the Tea Garden via AirBnB. You can find the booking details in the full show notes on our website.

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[main theme tune]

And with this, I send you off to plan your own trip to the Isle of Kerrera. This will not be the only small island off the beaten track that we're featuring this season, so stay tuned for more island inspiration.



Next week, we're sitting down with Kirsty Pallas, who you've heard from in this episode. She shares with us her story as a mountain guide on the west coast of Scotland and her work as part of the team behind Our Shared Outdoors, an organisation that works to increase the visibility of diversity in the Scottish outdoors.

I hope you'll tune in again.

Thank you so much for listening to Wild for Scotland and tuning in to season 4! This is and always has been a passion project of mine, but as an independently produced show, we really need your support. If you enjoyed this episode, help us by leaving a review on Apple Podcasts today, or sharing the link with a friend who might enjoy it. Thank you!

Wild for Scotland is part of the Tremula Network - adventure and outdoor podcasts off the beaten path. The show is written and hosted by me, Kathi Kamleitner. Thanks to Fran Turauskis who is the co-producer and editor, and does the sound design. And to Michelle Payne who help with transcripts and social media. Podcast art is by Lizzie Vaughan-Knight, the Tartan Trailburner and all original music is composed by Bruce Wallace.

Until next time, when we travel to a different place in Scotland.

[main theme tune end]

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[post roll ads]

If you're still here, listening all the way to the very end, I assume you are a super-fan, or you're driving and at the mercy of your podcasting app. Either way, you are still here, so I wanted to ask you for a wee favour. We've just launched our first annual listener survey to learn a bit more about what you enjoy about the show and how we can improve it going forward. It only takes a few minutes to complete and you can enter a prize draw for some cool rewards from Scotland. So, once you've got your hands free, follow the link in the show notes and fill in the Wild for Scotland Listener Survey. Thank you so much!