



Meet Neil Oliver

Picture a stunning beach scene complete with seals, you're sitting down by the local Lighthouse to enjoy a well-deserved picnic that incorporates produce from the best of the landscape that you've been wandering for hours. For me, a few warming nips of local whisky, fresh Tarbert scallops, and a rough platter of Mull of Kintyre Cheddar and oatcakes is as good as it gets; a rustic picnic, taste-bud-tease and sense of the remote and ancient all in one perfect package.

Scotland has long held an appeal to people in the UK who appreciate a mixture of beautiful scenery, traditional culture, history and food. And, to me it's particularly exciting to be given the chance to explore the provenance of a place less well-known, like the Kintyre Peninsular on the extreme west coast of Scotland.

It takes a little effort to get there, but a tour of famed local producers – such as the Campbeltown Creamery responsible for producing the award-winning Mull of Kintyre Scottish Cheddar – combined with the opportunity to take in the stunning scenery was more than enough of a reason for me to hop in a car and undertake the 40mile drive of the famed Kintyre Trail. The route begins in the town of Tarbert (famous for its King and Queen scallops), and is studded with walk-friendly hills, classic lochs, a bucket load of coastal delights and many local food experiences to savour. Travel should, in my view, take in all the senses and Kintyre does that for me.

You get the distinct impression here that, when it comes to things like producing Mull of Kintyre Cheddar, a cow is not just a cow. It's a whole diet and location and breeding equation below the surface. There are 38 farms supplying milk to the creamery and even the farms that supply milk to the creamery are special with local farmer Willy Ralston and his 200 strong Ayrshire herd named as AgriScot's 'Scottish Dairy Farm of the Year' last year. Willy's farm has been in the family for generations and his knowledge - passed from one generation to the next – is a great example of the sense of community responsibility that everyone here feels.

And it's not just the dairy farmers that I have to thank for the distinctive, moreish highlight of my post-dinner party cheeseboard and the cheddar that my wife and I indulge in when the children have gone to bed. The Campbeltown Creamery has been making Cheddar since 1923, so the dedicated creamery staff more than know their stuff. From the cheese maker Don McIvor who works through the night crafting the cheddar or Dorothy MacSporen, who hand dips Mull of



Kintyre cheddar truckles in wax, to Colin Orr an expert cheese grader who hand selects every batch of Cheddar to ensure it is perfect.

It really is all about the people and the characters behind the products and it goes to show you that, if you buy from the right places, you really are getting a product worth going the extra mile to enjoy.

The Gulf Stream runs the length of the west coast of the Peninsular – so the climate's often a lot kinder, and the water a lot warmer than you'd expect from such a remote area in Scotland. You can't walk more than a few hundred yards without spotting dairy cows happily grazing in local pastures and the remote ruggedness of the landscape really takes your breath away. It's not a bit of wonder the Mull of Kintyre Scottish Cheddar, can uphold claims of a unique, authentic flavour when you consider the combination of factors that make its origins so different.