



A Milestone for snappers

CLIVE WATKINS

It's the time of year when Irvine Camera Club would usually be about to embark on a spring and summer programme of field trips around the South West of Scotland.

After months of dark evenings being confined to club rooms at Townend Community Centre in Dregghorn, our keen photographers would be itching to get out to put into practice all of the advice given to them over the winter by judges and guest speakers.

As we all know, that just is not possible this year. So, despite the lighter evenings and the pleasant weather, we find ourselves limited to our gardens and short walks for our daily exercise.

I would still encourage everyone to take their cameras with them because, even by

adhering to social distancing, photographic opportunities still abound.

In the weeks to come, I hope to feature some of our members' photographs taken during the lockdown just to show you what is possible and what a creative lot they all are.

In the meantime, I thought it would be fun to look back to almost a year ago when a group of us chartered a small boat and headed across the sea from Girvan to Ailsa Craig.

It's perhaps the best-known Ayrshire landmark, punctuating the horizon between the south tip of Arran and the heads of Ayr.

Paddy's Milestone is such a well-known sight that many of us take it for granted and don't give it a second thought. Relatively few folk ever make the trip over.

For photographers, it offers a host of wildlife, wild cliffs and desolate shores. It is also rich with history.

Most notably, it was a source of materials to make curling stones and much of the mining paraphernalia is still present on the island. It has a magnificent Thomas Stevenson lighthouse which is now fully automated but once was manned.

The lighthouse keeper's cottages lie derelict, with some of the workers' belongings still left as they were when they finished their final shift.

We visited in May as the seabird breeding season was in full swing and as we approached the island, the sky was filled with squawking gannets.

The site of these handsome birds sweeping back their wings and diving into the water at tremendous speed is something

to behold. Puffins, oystercatchers and cormorants nest and breed here in abundance.

As we explored the lighthouse and derelict buildings, we noticed seals sunning themselves on the pebbly beach. We only had a couple of hours on the deserted island but it was a fascinating place to visit. I can safely say that Ailsa Craig will be on our agenda for a return visit next year.

Photographs are by Clive Watkins, Kenny Gordon, Douglas Sanderson, Kevin Thorne, Andy Burns, Jim Mason, Pat Snee, Ian Mortimer, Ian Johnstone, Alan Kempster and Joe Johnstone.

We hope to start the new season in September but until then we will be operating online.

If you are interested in joining the club, find us online on Facebook or via our own website www.irvinecc.co.uk