

An Tìr Ìseal Lurach

The Gem of the Western Main Tiree and its Postcards

'I fully expect that, "far on in summers which I shall not see", the Island of Tyree will be a great resort for health. Its strong yet soft sea air – its comparative dryness – its fragrant turf, full of wild thyme and white clover – its miles of pure white sandy bays, equally pleasant for riding, driving or walking or for sea bathing – and last and not least, its unrivalled expanses for the game of golf – all combine to render it most attractive and wholesome in the summer months.'

GEORGE DOUGLAS CAMPBELL, the 8th Duke of Argyll, writing in 1883

Tiree has been a tourist destination since the *Dunara Castle*, launched in 1875, offered forty cabins alongside its usual cargo on a meandering route between Glasgow and Skye.



A black-and-white painted postcard of Balephetrish from the first decade of the twentieth century. Note the flagpole at the top of Balephetrish Hill.



A tinted black-and-white postcard of Scarinish harbour from 1908. To the left is the Scarinish Light, built in 1897, while the large building in the centre is the Scarinish shop and post office on the site of the present Co-op. For many day-visitors on the inter-island ferry boat, this was all they saw of the island.

One passenger wrote: *'The average tourist trusts himself mainly to the weekly runs in summer of steamboats, and seldom ventures on shore much beyond a few hours to buy picture postcards, stare curiously about him, or watch the local bustle at numerous ports of call. What he does taste, in sea experiences and health pursuit, he relishes; and he returns south re-invigorated with the ozone of the Western Sea.'*

Plain postcards were introduced in 1870, but the picture postcard was only officially sanctioned by the General Post Office in Britain in 1894. This coincided with the growth of the seaside holiday to resorts such as Rothesay and Blackpool, and sending a postcard home became part of a regular summer ritual.

In 1907, the visiting lecturer Daniel Holmes could still report that *'Tiree is off the main tourist track'*. But a 1911 article in the *Oban Times* spoke of Tiree's tourist season being *'the best on record'*. The opening of the railway line to Oban in 1880 and the construction of Gott Bay pier in 1915 allowed reliable, safe access to the island for the first time. After the First World War, Tiree rapidly became a bespoke destination for middle-class holiday-makers taking advantage of the unrivalled beaches and golf courses. Tiree became a Restricted Area during the Second World War due to the huge RAF base on the island.



A postcard of a crofter with mare and foal outside a stable, thought to be the old smiddy near Kirkapol church. This sort of rural image was popular with the growing number of inter-war tourists.