Goatfell: possibly from the Gaelic ‘Gaoithbeinn’ or Norse ‘Geita–Fjall’, both meaning ‘Goat hill’ or from the Gaelic ‘Gaoda bheinn’ meaning ‘Windy hill’.

The Arran skyline is dominated by the jagged summits and ridges of Goatfell and the surrounding hills, providing a dramatic backdrop to Brodick Castle, Garden and Country Park. It is a spectacular example of an open, rugged, upland landscape formed during the last Ice Age.
Watch your feet

The many thousands of boots that climb these hills take their toll on the paths, quickly removing the thin layer of fragile vegetation. The steep ground beneath becomes eroded by the very wet Arran climate. The soft peat and soil becomes waterlogged and stripped away, leaving rough and boggy conditions, that are walked around, forming a wide scar on the landscape. Since the 1970s this problem has been tackled through extensive (and expensive!) repair and maintenance work, by groups of volunteers and professional footpath experts.

Wildlife – special species

Hen harrier – This bird (with a strikingly owl-like face) has a buoyant, graceful flight and can occasionally be spotted flying low across the heather moorland. The male bird is an unusual slate grey colour with black wing tips and the female has a distinctive white rump.

Ptarmigan – The Goatfell area is the most southerly home in Britain for this grouse. The ptarmigan is brilliantly camouflaged on the summits with a plumage that changes from mottled brown in the summer to white in the winter.

Dwarf willow – You'll have to look carefully for the smallest willow in Britain, as it grows to just 5cm tall on the higher parts of the mountain.

Dwarf juniper – If you keep an eye out on the main path up Goatfell you will almost certainly see this plant. A native to Scotland, this rare spreading plant lives in remote areas with a cool wet climate, and has short, broad needle-like leaves.

Importance of heather

For many people the shimmer of purple and the sweet scent of heather on the breeze symbolises the Highlands of Scotland. Heather moorland is at risk from deer and sheep grazing. It is an important habitat for birds and insects as nesting sites, food sources and shelter. Deer numbers are controlled to ensure that there is no loss in the extent of heather cover on the property.

Spot the difference

Is it a bird? Yes! Is it an eagle? If you think you've seen a golden eagle, you probably haven't! Both can be seen, but buzzards are more common on Arran than eagles. Mottled underneath, buzzards announce their presence with a loud mewing call. Eagles are much bigger, uniformly brown and generally quiet.

Enjoy the view

Goatfell is a very popular high level walk enjoyed by thousands each year. On a clear day you may see as far as Ben Lomond to the north and the coast of Ireland to the south-west. However, mountains must be treated with respect and dramatic changes in the weather conditions can occur throughout the year. The summit can be cold, wet and windy, even in summer, and visibility can be quickly reduced to a few metres. Be prepared by carrying a map, compass, torch, food and drink, and waterproof and warm clothing – it's easy to be caught out! The final 200m is steep and rocky and the path isn't always apparent, so take care on loose stones, especially in winter.

Wet can be good

Scotland has some of the most important areas of bog in the world, and Arran is doing its bit to help keep this habitat. Some drains that were dug in the early 1900s in the wettest areas in the Goatfell area are now being dammed to retain water and allow Sphagnum mosses to thrive under wetter conditions. Despite the damp conditions of Arran, long spells of dry weather can increase the risk of hillside fires. Dry, dead grasses can easily catch fire from sparks or cigarette ends. The last fire at Goatfell spread faster than you can run – so please be vigilant!