

News story: Scottish Secretary to travel to USA to mark Lockerbie 30th anniversary

Mr Mundell will also be supporting a nearly 700-mile charity bike ride across the US as part of the commemorations.

On 21 December 1988, 259 passengers on board Pan Am Flight 103 from London Heathrow were killed by a terrorist bomb which detonated in the skies above Lockerbie. The aircraft wreckage crashing on the town killed 11 Lockerbie residents. Thirty years on, a group of five local men are cycling from Lockerbie to Syracuse to complete the journey on behalf of those who could not.

The five 'Cycle to Syracuse' riders represent Lockerbie Academy, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the Scottish Ambulance Service and the RAF Mountain Rescue Service. They all have strong links with the town and the bombing. Their 672-mile Lockerbie – Syracuse journey remembers the 270 lives lost in the air and on the ground, the work of the emergency services, and the response of the townspeople in the aftermath.

The USA leg is the third and final stage of their journey. It started with visits to local schools around Lockerbie, and was followed by a mass cycle earlier this month which saw dozens of cyclists ride from Lockerbie to Edinburgh Castle where they were welcomed by Mr Mundell.

In the States they will set off today [Friday 26 October] from the Lockerbie memorial cairn in Arlington National Cemetery. They will ride through Maryland, Philadelphia and New York City, ending at Syracuse University in upstate New York next Thursday [1 November]. Mr Mundell will see the group off from New York's City's Central Park on Tuesday morning [30 October] on the final stage of their journey. He will then travel to Syracuse University to meet staff and students and take part in the University's annual remembrance week.

Since 1998 strong links have built up between the town of Lockerbie and Syracuse University, where 35 of the victims were studying. Since 1990, a 'Syracuse Scholarship' has allowed young people from Lockerbie Academy to study in the USA. Fifty eight students have now studied at Syracuse University, forging strong bonds and friendships between families on both sides of the Atlantic.

Scottish Secretary David Mundell said:

I was brought up in Lockerbie, and know how deeply the air disaster has impacted on the town. But I have also seen the very positive links which have grown between Lockerbie and Syracuse University

over the years since. As we approach the 30th anniversary of the bombing, it is fitting that five local men are making the journey to Syracuse to remember those lost, and to raise money for a local youth mental health charity. I look forward to seeing them off on the final leg of their journey, and to seeing our friends again in Syracuse for the University's 30th remembrance week.

Cycle team leader Colin Dorrance said:

Our journey to Syracuse started in the primary schools around Lockerbie. We have had the opportunity to tell the children about the bombing, but also about the wonderful opportunity that they may have to study at Syracuse in the future.

It has encouraged them to speak to their parents about the bombing, learning something of how it affected the older generation in 1988. We are all reminded of just how selfless and heroic so many people were, and how widely it is still talked about today. Of course, for some, the journey will never end.

"My teammates and I are focused on the 600 miles we will cycle in the USA over the next week, ending at Syracuse University. The prospect is exciting, humbling and moving all in one."

The cycle group, which is being sponsored by ScottishPower, is also raising money for local youth mental health charity Soul Soup, to employ a dedicated worker within Lockerbie Academy.

On their journey the cyclists are carrying a specially-crafted Shepherd's Crook, sourced from wood in the Tundergarth area near Lockerbie, and a book of commemoration. Both will be presented to the Chancellor and President of Syracuse University as gifts from the town of Lockerbie.