

SCOTTISH ANCHORAGES

(ANON)

Table of Contents

SCOTTISH ANCHORAGES.....	1
(ANON)	1
Table of Contents.....	1
Coll and Tiree	8
Last updated January 15 th 2024.....	8
Arinagour	9
Eilean Mòr (the Cairns of Coll).....	10
Gott Bay.....	11
Hynish.....	12
Loch Breacachadh (or Breachacha).....	12
Sorisdale bay	13
Colonsay	14
Last updated February 25 th 2022	14
Balnahard bay.....	15
Kiloran Bay.....	15
Oronsay, Caolas Mòr	15
Port Mòr.....	16
Scalasaig and Loch Staosnaig.....	17
Firth of Lorne	19
Last updated March 1 st 2024	19
Ardantrive Bay	20
Ardencaple Bay	20
Bàgh Bàn.....	21
Bàgh Gleann a'Mhaoil.....	21
Barnacarry Bay.....	21
Barr-nam-boc Bay.....	21
Belnahua.....	22
Black Mill Bay.....	22
Camas a'Mhòr-Fhir	23

Crinan	23
Cullipool.....	26
Easdale	27
Eilean Dubh.....	29
Fladda	29
Gallanach Bay.....	29
Gallanachbeg.....	30
Ganavan Bay	30
Garvellach Islands.....	30
Gylen Castle Bay.....	31
Little Horseshoe Bay.....	31
Loch Beag	33
Loch Feochan	33
Oban.....	34
Oitir Mhòr and Charlotte Bays	38
Poll nan Corran.....	39
Port Cuthaich (Sound of Kerrera)	39
Port nan Urrachann.....	40
Puilladobhrain	40
Gigha.....	42
Last updated January 15 th 2024	42
Ardminish Bay.....	43
Caolas Gialum (South Pier)	44
Cuddyport.....	44
Druimyeon Bay.....	45
East Tarbert Bay.....	45
Eilean Garbh (and West Tarbert Bay).....	45
Port Mòr.....	45
Islay.....	46
Last updated February 25 th 2022.....	46
Ardbeg (Loch an t-Sàilein)	47
Ardmore Islands	48
Bowmore.....	48
Bruichladdich.....	49
Bunnahabhain.....	49
Caol Ila.....	50
Kilnaughton Bay	50
Lagavulin	50
Laggan	51
Loch a'Chnuic	51

Nave island	52
Port Askaig	52
Port Charlotte.....	52
Port Ellen.....	52
Port Mòr, Glas Uig, Aros Bay	53
Portnahaven.....	53
Jura.....	55
Last updated February 19th 2024	55
Ardlussa and Lussa Bays.....	56
Bagh Gleann nam Muc (Bay of the glen of pigs)	56
Craighouse	57
Kinuachdrachd Harbour	59
Lagg Bay.....	59
Loch Tarbert	60
Lowlandman's Bay	61
Port an Tiobairt.....	61
Tarbert Bay	62
Kintyre.....	63
Last updated January 10 th 2024	63
Carsaig Bay	63
Eilean Mòr (MacCormick Islands with various alternative spellings).....	64
Eilean Tràigh, West Loch Tarbert	64
Head of West Loch Tarbert.....	65
Loch na Cille (Loch Keills).....	66
Loch Stornoway	66
Rathlin Island.....	67
Sailean Mòr.....	68
Sanda Island.....	68
Lismore	70
Last updated January 25 th 2024	70
Achnacroish	71
Bernera and Achadun bays.....	72
Lismore lighthouse (on Eilean Musdile)	72
Port Moluag.....	73
Port na Moralachd	73
Port Ramsay.....	74
Loch Caolisport.....	75
Last updated January 11 th 2024	75
Chapel Bay.....	75
Ellary	75

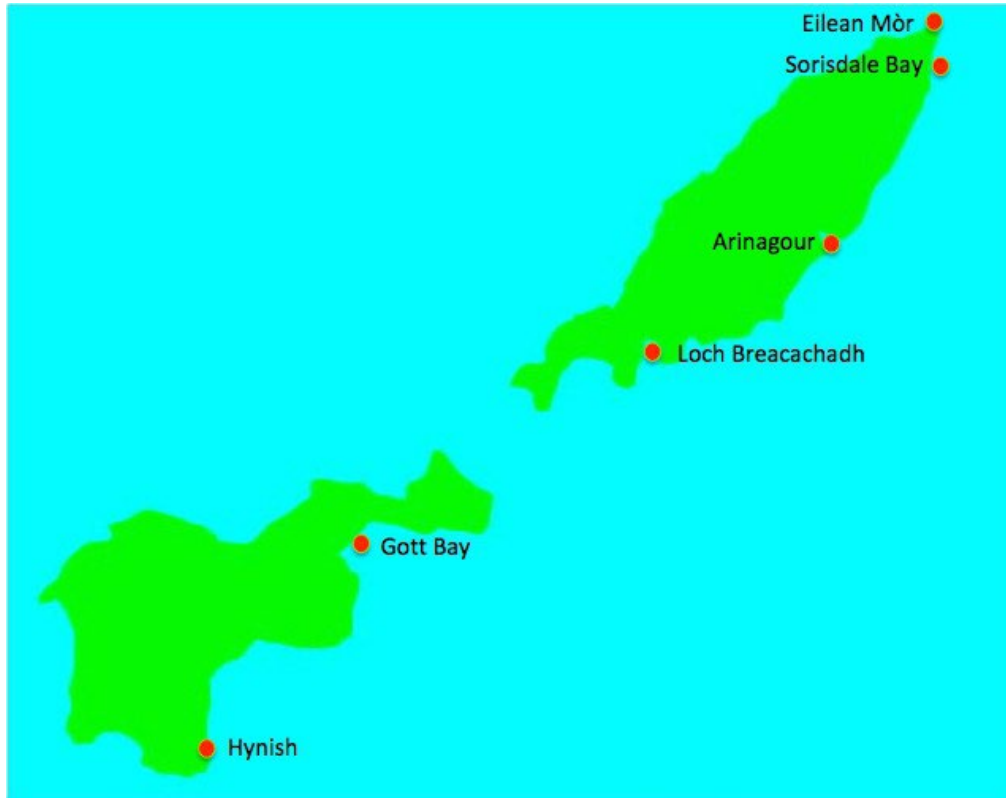
Tràigh Island	76
Muileann Eiteag Bagh.....	76
Eilean nam Muc.....	76
Loch Craignish.....	77
Last updated January 8 th 2024.....	77
Ardfern	78
Bàgh na Cille	79
Bàgh Dun Mhuilig.....	79
Eilean nan Gabhar (Goat Island).....	79
Eilean Macaskin	79
Eilean Rìgh (King's Island)	79
Stewart's bay	80
Loch Creran	81
Last updated 6 th January 2024.....	81
Barcaldine	81
Creagan	81
Glaceriska bay.....	82
Isle of Eriska	82
South Shian	83
Loch Etive.....	84
Last updated 6 th January 2024.....	84
Achnacloich Bay.....	85
Achnacreemore Bay.....	85
Airds bay.....	85
Ardchattan Church	86
Ardchattan priory	86
Sailean Ruadh	87
Stonefield Bay (Linne na Craige)	87
Upper Loch Etive	87
Loch Leven.....	89
Last updated 2 nd March 2022.....	89
Camas na h-Eirghe.....	89
Eilean Chonneich (Kenneth's Island)	90
Eilean Munde	90
Kinlochleven	90
Poll an Dùnain (Bishop's Bay).....	91
South Ballachulish (Baile a'Chaolais, Village of the Narrows).....	92
Loch Melfort and Loch Shuna.....	94
Last updated 6 th January 2024.....	94

Ardinamir Bay.....	94
Ardmaddy Bay.....	95
Asknish Bay.....	95
Bàgh an Tigh-Stòir	96
Balvicar	96
Craobh Haven.....	96
Cuan Sound (the Sound of the Ocean).....	97
Fearnach Bay.....	98
Kames Bay	98
Loch na Cille.....	98
North Asknish Bay.....	98
Poll na Gile.....	99
Shuna Island	99
Toberonochy.....	99
Loch Sunart.....	100
Last updated 6 th January 2024.....	100
Ardnastang Bay.....	100
Camas nan Geall.....	100
Carna West Kyle.....	101
Eilean Garbh (rough island).....	101
Glenmore Bay.....	101
Kilchoan	103
Liddesdale.....	103
Camas na h-Airbhe (the bay of the walled enclosure).....	103
Loch Drumbuie.....	104
Loch Teacuis	104
Mingary Bay.....	106
Oronsay	106
Salen	108
Strontian.....	108
Loch Sween.....	111
Last updated 6 th January 2024.....	111
Caol Scotnish	111
Castle Sween.....	111
Taynish Island.....	112
Tayvallich.....	112
Lower Loch Linnhe.....	115
Updated 26 th January 2024.....	115
Ardmucknish Bay.....	116
Camas Bruaich Ruaidhe (Saulmore) and South Connel Bay.....	116

Camas Chrònaig	117
Camas Eigneig	117
Camas Nathais	117
Camas Shallachain	118
Creag islands	118
Cuil Bay	118
Dallens Bay	118
Dunstaffnage	119
Eilean Balnagowan	121
Eilean Dubh (Loch Linnhe)	121
Glensanda	121
Kentallen Bay	122
Loch a'Choire	122
Onich	123
Port Appin and Airds Bay	123
Sheep Island (Eilean nan Caorach)	125
Shuna Island	125
The Small Isles and North of Ardnamurchan	126
Last updated 6 th February 2024	126
Arisaig	127
Canna	128
Eigg	130
Hyskeir (Òigh Sgeir — maiden rock)	131
Inverie	132
Loch Moidart	133
Loch Scavaig	133
Mallaig	135
Muck	135
Rum	137
Sanna Bay	139
Soay	139
Whitesand bay	139

Coll and Tiree

Last updated January 15th 2024



Frank Cowper got it wrong in 1896 when he wrote: *"As for Tiree and Coll, the less said about them the better"*¹. However, as John Knox had found in his tour 100 years earlier, his problem like Cowper's was the lack of safe anchorages which to some extent is still true today, even with our engines and chartplotters. Mind you it was to the safety of Loch Eatharna, then known as Lochiern and where Arinagour now is, that Boswell and Johnson got blown during a dark and stormy night in 1773²

Every island has its own character and Coll's³ is undoubtedly Outer Hebridean even though it is firmly part of the Inner Hebrides — similar forbidding eastern coastline, and similar delightful beaches on the western coastline. It has a population of around 200, with about 10 in the primary school. Something like a third of the houses are holiday or second homes these days. Interestingly,

¹ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent*

² *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. A real classic, and full of interest about the people, posh and not so posh, and on the nature of the Scottish as seen from the viewpoint of a Londoner in his 60s. 'The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.' James Boswell, 1785, Ed RW Chapman, Oxford University Press, 1970. Longer than Johnson's account, it focuses much more on Johnson than on Scotland. It adds to Johnson's description of Scotland and the Scots, and has the advantage of being written by a Scotsman rather than a literary intellectual from London.

³ <https://visitcoll.co.uk/index.php>

Coll too had a 'Whisky Galore' second world war moment when the Nevada⁴ ran aground in Struan Bay northeast of Rubha Mòr — quite an easy walk from the Sorisdale anchorage — and deposited thousands of cigarettes and other goodies for the islanders to squirrel away. In 2013 the island was awarded Dark-Sky status, although you would have to be sailing here early or late in the season to appreciate it.

Coll is probably best known outside Scotland as the home of Project Trust⁵ which sends young people in their gap year between school and university all over the world. And inside Scotland as an earlier home of Mairi Hedderwick⁶ who wrote the lovely Katie Morag children's stories. She also wrote a rather nice account of how most of Coll was once owned by a family who latterly farmed it and eventually by 1991 had sold most of their estate to the islanders, the RSPB and incomers⁷.

Tiree⁸, the final inhabited Hebridean island I got round to sailing to, is completely different to Coll, or anywhere else in Scotland. It reminds me more of Connemara — flat with occasional mountains poking up in the distance, although unlike Ireland the mountains here are on different land-masses (Jura, Mull, Rum and Skye). Tiree is so flat and low that global warming and a slight rise in sea level could do for it; imagine the chart in a hundred years, no Tiree just a couple of rocks — Sgeir Hough and Sgeir Hynish.

The island is not much visited by boaties, I guess because there is no all-weather anchorage. Indeed, the main one — Gott Bay — is exposed to the south and east, and not all that attractive. However, take a windsurfer — Tiree is famous for wind and waves (and sunshine). Strangely, given about 700 people live on Tiree, there seems to be relatively less than on Coll in the way of cafés or pubs. Maybe nothing changes because even back in 1695 Martin Martin complained that *"The ale that I had in the inn being too weak, I told my host of it, who promised to make it better"*.⁹ He didn't. The Ceabhar Restaurant at Sandaig¹⁰ is too far away from an anchorage although it certainly looks attractive from its website.

Finally, an unlikely difference between the two islands, this time from Daniel Defoe in 1761: *"The inhabitants are Protestants. They have a notion here, that Tyre-ty breeds more women than men, and Coll more men than women; so that they may people each other without the assistance of their neighbours"*¹¹

Arinagour

The visitors' moorings are too far out, too spread out, and anyway are no longer free, maybe because CalMac owns them. I reckon it is better to anchor near what is called the middle pier if it is

⁴ <https://www.scottishshipwrecks.com/nevada-ii/>

⁵ <https://projecttrust.org.uk/>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mairi_Hedderwick

⁷ The Last Laird of Coll. Birlinn, 2011,

⁸ <https://www.isleoftiree.com/>

⁹ A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland called Hybrides. Sir Donald Monro High Dean of the Isles, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1994. The first description, albeit brief and in places difficult to follow, of 209 islands in the 16th century (the original Haswell-Smith perhaps.

¹⁰ <https://ceabhar-restaurant-and-bun-dubh-brewery.business.site/>

¹¹ From the 1761 edition of 'A Tour thro' that part of Britain called Scotland', originally by Daniel Defoe, later editions and additions by Samuel Richardson.

not too shallow for you. Over the years, the three piers were built increasingly far away from the village, of course with increasing utility too but also with decreasing charm. The old pier in the 19th century, then in the 1960s the middle pier, and finally the 1987 new pier. This last is much in evidence in the Katie Morag stories written and illustrated by ex-local resident Mairi Hedderwick¹², and much loved by Scottish children who no doubt will all look out for Grannie Island driving her tractor and Grannie Mainland arriving on the CalMac ferry. The village was founded in the early 19th century by Alexander Maclean of Coll, so explaining the row of very similar — and charming to modern eyes — cottages along the main street. In recent years quite a few new houses have been built to accommodate a population which is now increasing.

The attractions in Arinagour include the shop for modest supplies, and the child and yacht extremely friendly and deservedly award-winning Coll Hotel¹³ for a shower, laundry which they will do for you (maybe not these days), bar and excellent food (ph 01879 230334). It is not cheap but then it would be a lot more expensive in London to eat lobster and scallops, and they would not be as fresh as they are here. Sit outside in the garden in good weather, and let the kids run free. Three generations of the Oliphant family have owned and cherished this hotel since 1984 — and it certainly shows.

There is a good café in the main street but not open every day (01879 230022)¹⁴, a rather nice general store and post office with of course the Katie Morag books and various crafts, a small play-park funded and built by the local community, and a craft shop/gallery. Don't miss the Parish Church on the hill which although a not very inspiring early 20th century Gothic confection has a fabulous wooden roof described in 'Pevsner' as *"This triumph of joinery is a wholly unexpected delight"*¹⁵ (sadly it is a bit spoiled by the electric lights strung from it — please Minister get rid of them, although in 2017 there was no Minister and may still not be).

There is a golf course at Cliad, but that is over two miles from the anchorage.

This is another of those anchorages with moorings, like Canna and Craighouse, which attract a lot of boats in the late afternoon, but most are gone in the morning, without anyone bothering to go ashore. Very strange, they miss a lot. However, the new Community Centre — An Cridhe¹⁶ — has been up and running since 2012 and has 24-hour showers, toilets and laundry facilities so there should be more incentive for boaties to step ashore. It is a lovely airy and clean building with amazing facilities — a gym, stage with lighting, sports hall/exhibition space, meeting room, small library, IT facilities, and DIY teas and coffees. The wood carving around the reception desk was designed by — who else? — Mairi Hedderwick.

Eilean Mòr (the Cairns of Coll)

I have not anchored amongst this group of small islands and skerries off the north tip of Coll. Although they have been a navigational hazard for centuries (*"remarkable for their fatality to sea-*

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mairi_Hedderwick

¹³ <https://collhotel.com/>

¹⁴ <https://islandcafecoll.co.uk/>

¹⁵ 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need are Argyll and Bute by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and Highlands and Islands by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

¹⁶ <https://ancridhe.com/>

faring men" wrote Martin Martin in 1695)¹⁷, they sound idyllic. So idyllic that they were bought by Sir (from 2024) Alexander McCall Smith¹⁸, the well-known and extraordinarily prolific Scottish author, in 2013. He intends to leave them in trust to the nation after his death, a generous and rather different attitude to some others who have bought Scottish islands recently and attempted to keep people off them — Shuna in Loch Linnhe, and Sanda, come to mind. He has been quoted in *The Scotsman* as saying *"I do not own these islands as I own my clothes, I am the person to whom the legal system of Scotland has given custody of this sacred spot, and that is something quite different. I want them kept in perpetuity as a sanctuary for wildlife — for birds and seals and all the other creatures to which they are home"*.¹⁹ Good on you I say.

Gott Bay

Large roll-on roll-off ferry piers are not an attractive feature in any anchorage, particularly in Gott Bay where the pier so dominates the flat landscape. But if you have made the effort to sail here it is worth getting off the boat, at least for a bit of a wander to admire the meadows full of wild flowers in the summer, corncrakes squeaking away. This is fertile farming land. Some visitor moorings appeared in 2017, if you don't want to anchor.

Scarinish, the main village, is a 15-minute walk, and has an excellent Co-op and even a butcher (but how long will he survive if even Mull can't support a butcher?). It was developed by the Duke of Argyll as a fishing village in the 18th century. Since 1999, the corrugated iron building on the road just south of Scarinish, An Iodhlann, originally built as a refuge for ferry passengers, then repurposed as a reading room, now contains the Tiree Heritage Centre which looks after several thousand items covering the island's history. Call in to take a look.

You will find the Scarinish Hotel²⁰ by the small and quite scenic old harbour. I have not been inside but it does not look very promising from the outside, more promising on their website (ph 01879 220308). However needs maybe must as the only other hotel, and bar, is about 30 minutes walk around the bay (the Tiree Lodge Hotel²¹). It did seem run-down, there was no real ale, and the barmaid was unfailingly glum but that was back in 2011 (ph 01879 220329). In 2013 it was under new management so things may have looked up, You will find a couple of medieval chapels and a burial ground to explore behind the hotel. so go and see for yourself.

If you have a morning to spare and could do with a longish walk there is a good circuit to take in the Ringing Stone (a large rock covered with cup marks on the northwest shore which when hit with a stone sounds hollow) and the 2nd-century Broch at Vaul²² which is in better condition than Tirefour on Lismore, but still only a few stone courses high. On the way, you will find the nine-hole golf course where, because it is essentially open meadow-land, the greens are enclosed so the animals can't get in to ruin them (apparently you have to chip the ball over the fences to reach the holes). There are fabulous beaches and the open farmland is most attractive. It is also good to see

¹⁷ A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland circa 1695. Martin Martin, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1994 is really the first good account of the Hebrides, and other islands. Written by a local ('a gentleman of Skye') in his 30s, who clearly travelled round all the places he wrote about, describing everything from the people, their religion, what they ate, farming, anchorages and lots more.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_McCall_Smith

¹⁹ <https://www.scotsman.com/news/mccall-smith-vows-give-cairns-coll-back-1531108>

²⁰ <https://www.tireescarinishhotel.com/>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/tireeluggers/>

²² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/21524/tiree-dun-mor-vaul>

the sympathetic way many of the old cottages have been restored, so much nicer than the modern houses (but I suppose darker inside without all those picture windows with views, and less convenient to live in). And unlike many of the other islands, the houses have been painted white, much more cheery than the ubiquitous grey.

Hynish

I have not anchored here either but it is definitely on my bucket list. Why? Because of the Lighthouse Stevensons connection. The buildings and pier were constructed in the mid-19th century for the workers building the Skerryvore Lighthouse, and then used as the shore station with lighthouse keepers' cottages before the light was automated. There is now a bit of a museum²³.

Loch Breacachadh (or Breachacha)

Another anchorage for when the wind is in the north, and very pleasant it is too although it is a bit of a row to get ashore, obviously more so at low tide and it would be a long walk carrying the dinghy. However, it is worth it to examine the three large stone buildings which is just about all there is, other than the fine beach and the birds. No trees either. Pretty bleak when the sun isn't shining, fabulous when it is.

First the old castle²⁴, once a ruin but restored in the late 20th century and privately owned by Nicholas and Lavinia Maclean-Bristol (founders of Project Trust²⁵). Indeed, the owners regard the small patch of grass between their fence and the foreshore as part of their 'garden' so don't settle down there amongst the sheep poo and spent cartridges. It is a strange looking castle, essentially a tower house with something of a curtain wall, all covered in very dull, but perhaps authentic, grey harling. Apparently there were originally no fireplaces, so it must have been hellish cold in winter. It was built by the MacLeans of Coll in the 15th century, altered in the late 16th and 17th centuries, but then abandoned in the 18th century when the MacLeans upgraded to an even stranger looking concoction next door, the new castle. Part of the strangeness of the old castle is that one is not used to seeing castles on Scottish beaches, they look better on rocky outcrops where they can be more easily defended. Indeed 'Pevsner' likens it to '*a heavily iced cake planted on the machair at the head of Loch Breacachadh*'!²⁶

New Breacachadh Castle, just up the hill, was originally an 18th century mansion with wings, dismissed as a "*tradesman's box*" by Dr Johnson in 1773.²⁷ It was then made ridiculous in the 19th century by the addition of a fourth floor with crenellated parapets and round corner turrets. It had been falling to bits but in 2016 it was up for sale at £450 000, and now — astonishingly — it is now a self-catering establishment²⁸. It was hard not to wish the whole lot couldn't just be taken apart and the stone used for something far nicer, but you never know it may turn out fine as a hotel. Fine like, for example, by far the most attractive of the three buildings, the late 18th

²³ <https://www.scottish-places.info/towns/townfirst3866.html>

²⁴ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/21576/coll-breachacha-castle>

²⁵ <https://projecttrust.org.uk/product/project-trust-50th-anniversary-polo-regular/>

²⁶ Pevsner *ibid*.

²⁷ A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland'. Samuel Johnson, 1775, Ed RW Chapman, Oxford University Press, 1970. a real classic, and full of interest about the people, posh and not so posh, and on the nature of the Scottish as seen from the view of a Londoner in his 60s.

²⁸ <https://breachachacastle.com/>

century farm steading²⁹, a delightful collection of buildings now being restored by I believe a group of five co-owners. A charming addition and complement to the landscape, not a foolish erection like the new castle.

You will find the birds — corncrakes etc — on the RSPB reserve³⁰ just to the northwest of the anchorage.

Sorisdale bay

With the wind in the northwest this makes a good little anchorage, and there is a nice sandy beach too (although last time I was there we had to christen it 'Dog Poo Beach' for obvious reasons). There are the remains of a few old houses and some new ones, including a rather large and I fear dull modern confection bang in the middle of the view from the anchorage. So if you are sensitive to these things you will have to avert your eyes and gaze out at Ardnamurchan Point, or go elsewhere. In fact if you walk up the little rise to the north of the bay you get a quite spectacular view to Ardnamurchan, Rum, Eigg and Muck. I have not found what is meant to be a bowl cut in the rock³¹ by some ancient tribe. One of the scenes in the 1960 film Bridal Path³² was filmed here. If you walk west along the road for about a mile you come to Struan Bay where the Nevada³³ ran aground in 1942 depositing all those cigarettes.

²⁹ <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/200399918-breachacha-steading-and-farmhouse-coll#.YerdzFjP31I>

³⁰ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/coll>

³¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/271143/coll-rhubha-bgh-na-coille>

³² <http://www.scotlandthefilm.com/movies/bpcoll.html>

³³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-scotland-19330702>

Colonsay

Last updated February 25th 2022



Colonsay ¹ is the land of the McPhees or Macfies or of the various other spellings of the same clan name. From the east side of the island, the Paps of Jura seem ever present, and the light is fabulous which must explain why there are so many paintings of this view (indeed I have two). In 2022, the island had a population of about 130, but there were fewer than 30 people under the age of 50, and only four children in the primary school. It is very much a holiday destination depending on tourism, as well as on farming. And we are talking Waitrose- not Lidl-man judging by the over-large SUVs and BMWs lined up at the ferry terminal in Oban (many people I know have rented a cottage here, or several different cottages over the years, including me). This is not too surprising given that the estate² has about 20 properties to rent (which seems a bit excessive for the size of the local population, and in stark contrast to only nine

social housing units and the dire lack of affordable housing). However, it is a lovely island with many sandy beaches, a good hotel (closed in winter), a bookshop, a ruined priory, and lots of walks. There are not that many anchorages and the main one at Scalasaig is not that wonderful, but there is a good alternative in the next bay to the south — Loch Staosnaig.

There is a folk music festival³ in September but you have to book early as places are limited — it could be a bad time of year for sailing, so go by public transport if necessary. You could even try Hebridean Air Services⁴ which has scheduled flights from Oban, albeit with a very limited

¹ <https://colonsay.org.uk/>

² <https://www.colonsayholidays.co.uk/the-island/the-estate/563>

³ <https://ceolcholas.co.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.hebrideanair.co.uk/>

timetable. Amazingly, there is a book festival too⁵, in April. Finally, if you want to hire a bike, contact Colonsay Bike and Board Hire (ph 01951 200479)⁶.

Balnahard bay

This must be the perfect beach for children — loads of sand, rock pools, and sand dunes. And very few if any people because it is three miles from the nearest road. It may not have the surf or grandeur of Kiloran but unlike that beach it is protected from the prevailing winds from the west. Over the sand dunes and up a track just to the south of west, in about half-a-mile by a modern barn, you will find the remains of a 13th century cell or chapel dedicated to Saint Catherine of Alexandria (whoever she was)⁷. But you have to be seriously addicted to such things to make the trip worthwhile because in truth it is just a pile of old stones, plus a very worn stone cross. There is an ancient burial cist right by the barn in a small fenced-off area. Better, I reckon, to just take the sun on the beach and admire the view from the Outer Hebrides past Mull and the Firth of Lorne to Jura.

Kiloran Bay

This must be one of the best sandy beaches in the whole of the Inner Hebrides, but because it is accessible by road (well, sort of, hardly the M8) you won't often have it to yourself. In any event it has to be very calm to get rid of the swell that makes landing from the dinghy tricky. As if to emphasise the swell problem you may well see surfers floating about ready to catch a wave, in which case don't take the dinghy — swim ashore instead. It is a great beach for children for sure, and on a hot calm sunny and warm day it is definitely worth a stopover if not a detour. At the north end of the beach, where the golden sand of most of the beach turns to grey, you will find some rather good caves in what I presume is igneous rock; — they extend quite a way, so take a torch. Apparently they sheltered people of the Azilian culture⁸ in about 6000 BC

Oronsay, Caolas Mòr

Reserve this lovely spot for a hot summer day, definitely don't come on a bad day. There are any number of anchorages to choose from. If you pick your timing right there will be very few people around on the island because they can only walk across from Colonsay itself at low water. The beaches round the anchorage are stunning with plenty of machair (dunes) to act as wind shelters, and there are great views of the Paps of Jura. In any photograph on a sunny day it would look like Greece or the Caribbean, the giveaway being that the grass is green and not brown. Behind the dunes is one of the best of so many places for Hebridean flowers: tormentil, bog asphodel, birdsfoot trefoil, eyebright, heathers, orchids and all the rest. Marvellous! Picnic or barbecue, or both. We celebrated my eldest son's 8th birthday here, the first year we had Calypso in 1988.

⁵ <https://www.colonsaybookfestival.com/>

⁶ <https://www.colonsaybikesandboards.co.uk/bikes/>

⁷ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38168/colonsay-balnahard-cill-chaitriona>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azilian>

Then take a walk up to the 14th-century Augustinian Oronsay Priory⁹ — a remarkably well-looked-after ruin for such a remote place so far off the ecclesiastical tourist trail. It stands on the site of a much earlier 6th century monastic foundation, with the usual — for these parts — St Columba connection, real or imagined. Indeed, the island's name comes from St Oran (or Odhran), an Irish friend of St Columba who accompanied him to Scotland.

The present buildings are mostly 14th and 15th century. They fell into disrepair in the 17th century. The Victorians did some repairs, in particular of the west arcade of the cloister, the east gable and extension to the church (with the McNeil tombs), and the Prior's House which contains some very fine 15th and 16th century graveslabs solemnly stacked up round the walls (no guide to who was who anymore I think). In a small chamber off the south wall of the church you will find a stone recess with human bones, something to scare the children.

Just to the west of the church stands the late 15th century Oronsay cross, one of the finest high crosses in Scotland. The cross to the east is much smaller and more weathered — it is a combination of an Oronsay school 16th century cross head with a 14th to 15th century Iona shaft.

The adjacent farm buildings look rather good, privately owned and currently tenanted by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds who are dedicated to saving the corncrake and red-billed croun. The island was bought and the farm restored by an American couple in 1984 — Ike and Frannie Colburn (his mother was Scottish which probably explains why). The whole island is designated an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Jane Smith has written and illustrated a rather charming book about the Oronsay wild life: 'Wild Island, a Year in the Hebrides', Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2016. And even earlier, in 1887, Mrs Frances Murray — American, suffragist and early feminist, married to a rich Glaswegian lawyer — wrote a splendid book for her friends about her long and adventurous family holidays based in the long-disused and partially ruined Oronsay House on the island. She was clearly posh, rather patrician, tough too, and she seemed was very sympathetic to the local islanders¹⁰.

Port Mòr

I have not myself anchored here but once you find your way in through the skerries I am told it is very protected. The bookshop was once the main reason to visit but it moved to Scalasaig in 2012. The Colonsay and Oronsay Heritage Trust¹¹ is up the road in the old Baptist Church. Presumably they and the Colonsay website spell Oronsay with two rather than with one 'a' because it is named after St Oran, but most people and the OS map go for Oronsay — the 'ay' bit means island in Old Norse. I have yet to visit. And nor have I visited the nearby 18-hole golf course¹² — not my game at all. There is an honesty box. Apparently the course is over 200 years old.

⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37822/oronsay-oronsay-priory>

¹⁰ Summer in the Hebrides, Sketches in Colonsay and Oronsay. James Maclehose & Sons, Glasgow, 1887.

¹¹ <http://www.spanglefish.com/ColonsayandOronsayHeritageTrust/index.asp>

¹² <https://colonsay.org.uk/things-do/golf>

The Kilchattan graveyard up the road is nothing very special, in the middle are the ruins of a 14th century chapel.

Scalasaig and Loch Staosnaig

There may not seem a lot to choose between these two anchorages, but they are very different. Either you can go for convenience and tie up to the pier and roll around with everyone else in the swell that sets into the bay at Scalasaig (and pay for the privilege) or, just around the corner, there is an easy anchorage in Loch Staosnaig (or Queen's Bay) from where it is a 20-minute walk to the hotel (head up the hill on a narrow path to the right of the signs for the electricity cable). This latter anchorage has a delightful sandy bay with a beach that dries out a long way at low tide, ideal for children to mess around on. Above half tide it's good for swimming and snorkelling around the tidal islet. If you don't fancy the water then you can just look at the view of the Paps of Jura. But, dear oh dear, moorings are planned for the faint hearted who won't/can't anchor. Time to move somewhere else! Or, as they may be quite a long way out, anchor inside them.

Two hundred yards from the Scalasaig ferry pier (original bit 1850 with roll-on roll-off extension in 1988) is a convenient and quite well-stocked shop, but being an island you cannot always get bread or fresh milk — but nor do you have to tolerate the horribleness of a large Tesco. Right by the pier, the Pantry_(ph 01951 200325)¹³ is a great place for home-baked cakes, real coffee and I believe fresh bread if you order it. It does lunches too, and dinners but not every evening. In 2021 it doubled its indoor space with a modernistic prefabricated box that arrived on the island in two pieces. Unfortunately this has substituted the view of the pier from the garden, with the view of the pier from the dining tables. Also just by the pier there is an art gallery¹⁴ in the old waiting room, with attractive craft items.

Up the road from the pier is the 18th century Colonsay Hotel¹⁵ (original building circa 1750). To make my hackles rise, it has been rebadged as 'The Colonsay', and in some quarters is regarded as a 'boutique' hotel — it is a bit unclear exactly what clientele it is aiming at. However, honour redeemed, it is friendly to children and sailors, it has a bar, and a nice enough restaurant with gastro-pub food (ph 01951 200316). In 2021 it was up for sale, offers over £650 000.

Beer was brewed on the island since 2007, you could get it on draft in the hotel. It was said to be the most remote brewery in the UK and I can well believe it, but no longer — the beer is now brewed in Alloa (the original brewery is now into the modern fashion of distilling gin)¹⁶.

The parish church¹⁷, earlier than many still standing at 1801-4, is nicely perched on a mound opposite the hotel, but close-up it is not all that interesting, either inside or out. Except the pewter baptismal font hinged on a rail is worth a look. Although originally designed for 400 'sitters', the regular congregation is now down to a dozen or less, so there are real problems

¹³ <https://www.thecolonsaypantry.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.balnahard.com/seapinkgallery>

¹⁵ <https://www.colonsayholidays.co.uk/hotel/>

¹⁶ <https://thegincooperative.com/gin-maker/colonsay-beverages/>

¹⁷ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37934/colonsay-scalasaig-scalasaig-parish-church>

with the upkeep. For example, in 2015 they were trying to raise £60 000 to stabilise the belfry, maybe grants and crowd funding will do the trick. I am in no way religious but it is very, very sad to see these historic and reassuring buildings going downhill. Apart from castles, they are more or less the only physical remains of our history.

Finally, miracle of miracles, there is a bookshop¹⁸ next to the gin distillery. The opening hours are limited so phone ahead — 01951 200320. They have a collection of new and second-hand books, majoring on Argyll, but also covering the rest of the Hebrides and Scotland, with some children's books thrown in. There is even a local publishing company, the House of Lochar¹⁹. Long may it live, although I believe it is not taking on any more new titles. And there is a book festival²⁰ in the spring.

I imagine the two-and-half mile walk to Colonsay House (which is private) would be good, but I haven't done it. Its gardens²¹ sound fine, and there is a café, but not open every day, so check (ph 01951 200211).

¹⁸ <https://colonsay.org.uk/shops-food/bookshop>

¹⁹ <http://www.houseoflochar.com/index.htm>

²⁰ <https://www.colonsaybookfestival.com/>

²¹ <https://www.colonsayholidays.co.uk/the-island/gardens-cafe/565>

Firth of Lorne

Last updated March 1st 2024



I am never exactly sure where the Firth of Lorne starts and finishes, but let's say it starts at Crinan at the top of the Sound of Jura to the east, stretches across to the Garvallach Islands in the west, from where it extends north to Lower Loch Linnhe. So it will include Oban but not Dunstaffnage. It should of course also include the southeast coast of Mull, but that is described separately.

This whole area is steeped in history and pre-history, from burial cairns and cup marks, to defensive Duns and the occasional broch, to St Columba and the other Celtic Christian monks who brought their religion from Ireland, the first Kings who made their capital at Dunadd near Crinan, the Vikings, and the Lords of the Isles. Robert Buchanan was more poetic in 1871 when for him the

Firth of Lorne was “a glorious sheet of salt water, fed by the mighty tides of the Atlantic, and forming, both on the islands and on the mainland, a line of sea-coast not easily matched for loneliness and beauty. Numerous islands, large and small, stud the waters, forming narrow passages through which the tide boils with terrific fury.”¹

Ardantrive Bay

In times very long past this bay was regarded as the best anchorage in the Oban area. Now it is too full of the pontoons and moorings of Kerrera Marina (once known as Oban Marina)² (ph 01631 564533) to anchor. This marina has struggled over the years, but in 2017 new owners took over with great enthusiasm, so things were looking up and the place had a good buzz about it. But they gave up in 2021 and more new owners have taken over — very good luck to them, Tim and Gill. You don't have to go across to Oban to eat out because the marina has its own very nice Waypoint Restaurant. If you do want to go to Oban for provisions and so on you will need to summon the water taxi.

From the marina you can explore the same places as from Oitir Mhòr bay (see below). The walk between the two anchorages takes you through a rather nice farmyard, great for kids, with hens, ducks, pigs and highland cattle. Plus you can buy their farm produce, eggs, beef and so on.

The spelling of this place varies, sometimes it is Ardentrive Bay, irritating for someone like me who has enough trouble with ordinary spelling.

Ardencaple Bay

This bay may not be as totally enclosed but it is much quieter than Puilladobhrain (see below). Indeed, anchored just east of Ardfad point one can see all the many masts in Puilladobhrain and wonder what makes the human race cluster so closely together.

On Ardfad point there are several rocky outcrops on one of which — the one with the ash tree — is the very ruined remains of Ardfad castle, ³ more like a fortified house. Another McDougall construction. Ardencaple House is a bit further to the west, a rather fine late 18th century laird's house, once lived in by the late Mrs Frances Shand Kydd, Princess Diana's mother, now by James Taylor. He runs the surrounding sporting estate and is also into conservation. There has been a lot of deciduous tree planting, and new wildlife ponds in front of the house. It is all rather private with a big sign ‘No access by vehicle or on foot’ and a lot of fences (to keep the animals away from the young trees apparently).

The whole place is awash with wild flowers, and seals haul themselves out on the small skerries to stare at you. It is a good spot for children to be let loose in the dinghy — lots of little islands to row around and land on.

¹ ‘The Land of Lorne including the cruise of the Tern to the Outer Hebrides’. Robert Buchanan, Chapman and Hall, London, 1879. This is possibly the first account of west coast of Scotland sailing, written by a quite well known Scottish poet, novelist and dramatist. This was, however, his only book about sailing, and in large part it is a panegyric for the area.

² <https://kerreramarina.com/>

³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22589/seil-ardfad-castle>

Bàgh Bàn

This is easy to miss as you sail to and fro concentrating on the tidal times at the Dorus Mòr. Although there is nothing that special to do ashore, and there is a lot of litter around the bay, there are grand views from the anchorage to Scarba and the Corryvreckan. A surprisingly large roofless old boathouse (if that is what it is) sits on the southwest shore of the bay. So you don't have to inflate the inflatable, just sit back and enjoy the view — gin and tonic in hand. But then there are a large number and variety of prehistotic cup marks in some rocks up the hill to inspect (marked on the OS map)⁴.

Bàgh Gleann a'Mhaoil

The bay itself does not have much to offer other than remoteness and a rather broken-down cottage. But the walk north to Kilmory Lodge is terrific, high up above the Sound of Luing (Scarba Sound on older maps), almost as though you are in an aeroplane, with views across to Mull, Easdale, Luing, Loch Melfort, Shuna, Crinan and Kintyre. A truly spectacular walk. You pick up a Land Rover track just above the cottage and head north up the hill to the right.

Everyone who has sailed through the Sound of Luing must have noticed Kilmory Lodge, so conspicuous up on the hill, the only inhabitable house on the island. Close up it is bigger than it appears from the sea, with extensive steadings, and it seems very well maintained and appointed. Presumably the owner, Shane Cadzow whose family invented the Luing breed of cattle, comes here from time to time, maybe to shoot things. But I have never seen a soul moving on Scarba⁵ on the many occasions I have sailed by. It is essentially uninhabited.

There is a ruined 14th century chapel and burial ground somewhere down by the shore below Kilmory Lodge that I have not seen — Cille Mhoire an Caibel. I suspect it is difficult to find.

Barnacarry Bay

Not anything really to see and do here, except go for a walk and sit on the beach (black and slightly gravely sand). The farm above the beach looks very spick and span, as does the farmhouse. If you are in to duns, there is one on the point of the east arm of the bay⁶.

Barr-nam-boc Bay

An odd name — ridge of the roebucks, in translation. Rather a good spot in an easterly wind. The trouble was when I was there the wind was so strong I couldn't get ashore safely enough to explore. However, there is a lovely walk on a track round to the Kerrera Tea Garden described under the Little Horseshoe Bay anchorage — about a mile (see below). And there is a pretty good view to the west which majors on sunsets. Once upon a time cattle were landed here from Mull and then

⁴ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22582/achanarnich-1>

⁵ <https://www.southernhebrides.com/isle-of-scarba/>

⁶ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22992/dun-mhic-raonuill>

driven over the hill to Ardantrove Bay from where they were persuaded to swim to the mainland, and so to market

Belnahua

After 30 or more years of sailing straight past this tiny misshapen island (misshapen by the hand of man), I finally anchored there one sunny early spring day⁷. It is certainly fascinating — and thought provoking — to wander around the ruined workers' cottages, and the flooded quarries, from where the slate roofs of so many Scottish homes once came (one cottage is being restored, a bit of a surprise)⁸. There are well-made stone walls to keep the sea out of the quarries. At its peak in the 1880s, the Slate Islands were producing about 9 million slates per annum (from here along with Luing, Seil, Easdale, Shuna and Torsa).

It is difficult to imagine that about 150 people once lived here, there was a school and even a shop. And how they lived, and how they sustained themselves — maybe the Christian religion with the hope of better things after death did the trick. Apparently there was not even a reliable source of water, only an artesian well. Sometimes water had to be brought over from Lunga, Luing or Eilean Dubh. The working, and living, conditions must have been terrible.

No more slate mining now of course, it all vanished from here after the First World War, as did the local population. Instead of wearing out the young slate miners in Scotland we are probably doing much the same to the even younger slate miners in China.

Off the slate beach on the east side you will find what appear to me to be the very best skimming stones in Scotland. And definitely walk to the top of the hill for the all-round panoramic view, and of the tide swishing boats through the Sound of Luing.

In 1936 a Latvian ship heading from Liverpool to Blythe to pick up coal to take to Riga was wrecked here in a storm, the *Helena Faulbaums*⁹. Her SOS message was picked up in Northern Ireland. As the telephone lines had been blown down, the BBC was asked to broadcast a message over the wireless (aka the radio these days!) for the Islay lifeboat. Four survivors were eventually found by the lifeboat on the by-then uninhabited island, and later 16 bodies were washed up on Luing. Rather poignantly, a personal connection is still kept up between Luing and Latvia.

Black Mill Bay

This is a slightly sad place because once it was a hive of activity with steamers between the Clyde and Oban calling at the now very ruined pier to take on passengers, animals and — not surprisingly — loads of slate. Puffers came too, carrying coal for the island. The ticket office still remains, now I guess a fisherman's store. But, it is a good place to search out a Luing cow¹⁰ or two, the breed which was started here by the Cadzow family in the 1950s, a cross between Highlander and Beef Shorthorn cattle. And if you fancy renting a luxurious-sleeps-seven-lodge¹¹ there is just the job on the hill above the bay (another Cadzow family enterprise).

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belnahua>

⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22639/belnahua-slate-quarries>

⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/102565/helena-faulbaums-belnahua-sound-of-luing>

¹⁰ <https://luingcattlesociety.co.uk/the-luing>

¹¹ <http://www.isleofluingcottages.co.uk/>

Camas a'Mhòr-Fhir

There are two anchorages on Lunga and this one is by far the most dramatic. What is more it is very easy to get into and out of. The bay is amazing, almost completely blocked off from the open sea by the great lump of Scarba. Anchored here gives one the feeling of being surrounded by rocky mountains, green in summer and purple with heather in the autumn, although nowhere is very high. Nonetheless, terrific for the Inner Hebrides.

The name is very apt — the bay of the giant. There is a stony beach which invites a barbeque although driftwood is hard to find. At low tide there is sand enough for sandcastles. Unfortunately there is far too much plastic litter thrown up on the beach to the high water mark, and no one to cart it away. Just maybe there are otters in the steep burn that comes down into the bay.

In October 2016 what looked like prefabricated bits of house were being unloaded in the bay by two men in kilts. Then, by 2018, a strange hut-like structure appeared on the shore. It has a wooden deck with up-lighters, a wind generator, a diesel generator, a single bed and a bean-bag, and a wood-burning stove, all tied down with a ratchet strap to stop it all being blown away in a gale. Someone's summerhouse I suppose, for someone who likes to be far away from it all.

It is not easy walking around Lunga¹², but not impossible. There are no paths, and in the summer the bracken is extremely thick. It is of course possible to walk to the Little Corryvreckan (the Grey Dogs Channel) but this is easier from Poll nan Corran (see below). I am not sure if at low tide you can get across to the islands in the north — possibly not, and nor whether there is anything special to see and do if you can — probably not. By and large Lunga is a place for scenery and views of other islands.

I have never found it, but there are the remains of a well at Tobar a Challuim-Chille¹³ (the well of St. Columba's church), northwest of Bidean na h-Iolaire (the island's highest point), which was once used by the slate miners on Belnahua (see above).

The island is owned by the Torquil Johnson-Ferguson family who used to run the Rubha Fiola adventure centre, a not inexpensive place to dump your children for a week or two in their holidays (my wife was dispatched there by her parents). It was closed down after the manager was jailed for sex offences. Lunga is now used for grazing animals and I don't think there are any permanent inhabitants, notwithstanding the few houses at Poll nan Corran (see below).

Crinan

Even the dire architecture and roof-top excrescences of the several times rebuilt Crinan Hotel cannot detract from the charm of the canal basin (but beware midges under the trees). As ever 'Pevsner' gets it bang on: *'A unique intimate place of green grass, white walls and black lock gates'*¹⁴.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunga,_Firth_of_Lorn

¹³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22550/lunga-tobar-challuim-chille>

¹⁴ 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need are Argyll and Bute by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and Highlands and Islands by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

There always seems to be something going on at Crinan, at least in the summer, and you can join in with the main occupation which is to watch the boats making a cock-up of getting in and out of the locks, or being hurled around the sea lock as the water is allowed in. This is a great place to lounge, have an ice cream, and generally hang out. The new toilets are a welcome addition.

Lock 16, the small café in the early 19th-century old post office, is nice but pricey (did my eyes or memory let me down, were the cappuccinos really £3.50 in 2014? Yes they were, I re-checked in 2016 (presumably much more now). If you really want to spend more money, then dine in the Westward on the ground floor of the Crinan Hotel¹⁵(ph 01546 830261). It's good food, but maybe not so good to stop you feeling uncomfortable as a scruffy yachtie. Their Seafood Bar does excellent fish and chips for £10.50 (2015), and other more expensive stuff (linen napkins too). The public bar next door is small and cosy, but no real ale last time I asked.

The hotel — and indeed the café — is very keen on hanging and encouraging original art¹⁶, not surprising as Frances MacDonald, a well known Scottish painter, is the widow of Nick Ryan. They ran the hotel since 1970, and now she carries on running it. She has also made something of a secret garden behind the hotel, and it is I think open to the public.

I have never had to call on the services of the Crinan boatyard¹⁷, or their chandlery, but they are I believe very good, and they have visitor moorings if you can't be bothered to anchor off the hotel where there is a convenient slipway (ph 01546 830232).

For the modestly energetic, a walk along the canal towpath is a pleasure at any time of the year, from primroses in the spring to the colours of autumn. The 200+ year old canal¹⁸ is of course a treat all of its own, built to connect the Clyde with the West Coast without ships having to round the Mull of Kintyre. At first it was used by coastal vessels, fishing boats and colliers, then rich tourists travelling by steamer from Glasgow to the West Coast and the wonders of Staffa, now it is almost entirely for the leisure trade but the transiting steamers have long gone. The anonymous old quote 'Britain's most beautiful shortcut' sums it up just right. For those who don't like going to sea at all, follow Sandi Toksvig who, passing through the Crinan Canal while being sailed round Britain, decided she liked "*sailing in places where you have land on either side of the boat. You can choose to sail or walk or ride a bike as you pass some of the most invigorating scenery in the world.*"¹⁹

The early sailors had no engines of course, so towed their boat with or without a hired man, or used a horse like the Rev. C Wilkinson in 1892: "*A horse covered with more or less skin tows you through at trotting speed for half-a-sovereign*".²⁰ The problem then was stopping in the locks, particularly if the wind was from behind. The technique was to throw a stern rope round a hook on or by the lock gate as you went in (the hooks are mostly still there — and used by those in too much of a hurry!).

¹⁵ <https://www.crinanhotel.com/>

¹⁶ https://www.crinanhotel.com/en/crinan-fine-art_46913/

¹⁷ <https://crinanboatyard.co.uk/>

¹⁸ <https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/canals/crinan-canal/>

¹⁹ 'Island Race, an improbable voyage round the coast of Britain'. John McCarthy and Sandi Toksvig. BBC Books, London. 1995.

²⁰ By Ocean, Firth and Channel. Amateur Cruising on the West Coast of Scotland and North of Ireland. 1994. By 'Diagonal White' (aka Rev C Wilkinson). Late 19th century quite matter-of-fact description of cruises from Northern Ireland to the Clyde and up to Skye.

If you walk along the towpath from the Crinan basin to the first bridge, cross over and turn left you soon come to a way marked track up the hill to the right. It leads to a charming walk constructed by the Woodland Trust²¹ who own the land here. They are restoring many broadleaf woods in the UK, here a remnant of Scotland's remaining temperate rain forest. The walk takes you back to the canal basin in an hour or so, allowing for dawdling along the way, sitting on rustic benches to admire the view and all of that. Or do the walk the other way round, from the canal basin.

Another walk is from Crinan Harbour, where the road ends, towards Ardnòe Point where in 1km you should find the gravestone of a 19th century skipper who died of cholera. Do not take the main path up the hill but the narrow, boggy, rough and generally rubbish and poorly marked path through the woods along the shoreline. The gravestone is very hidden in the undergrowth and in truth I have not been able to find it! I rather hoped I would somehow trip over it amongst all the tree roots, in the same way as Rat and Mole found Badger's House in the Wild Wood in 'Wind in the Willows'. Possibly better to anchor in the bay if you can, rather than walk from the canal basin because there is too much road that way. And do what I didn't — use the OS map, and look for the ash tree over the gravestone at grid reference 773 945.

A longer walk of four miles, the so-called Crinan Trail, takes that uphill path I just mentioned²². Follow the waymarks and you will eventually come to Castle Dounie, ²³ a ruined but still recognisable iron-age fortification, or dun, perched on top of a small hill. The views from there from way down Jura to the mountains on Mull and Ben Cruachan are truly stunning. On the way If you are wondering what the tall brick chimney is doing at the back of the houses in Crinan Harbour, it is part of a ruined 19th-century chemical factory where pyroligneous acid was distilled from birchwood.

If she is not in the basin, you may have spotted her under a smudge — or cloud — of black smoke — the VIC 32²⁴, the last seagoing coal-fired Clyde 'Puffer'. She was built in Yorkshire in 1943 (same age as me!) and used in the war by the navy as one of the Victualling Inshore Craft (hence VIC) around Scotland. Keith Schellenberg, a former erratic owner of Eigg, got hold of her in the 1960s, then Nick and Rachel Walker bought her in 1975 and set about a complete restoration so they could use her to take passengers on scenic cruises around this part of Scotland. They eventually gave her to the Puffer Preservation Trust in 2002 so she could carry on where they left off. Long may she steam!

What to do if you find yourself stuck in Crinan on a wet, horrible and windy day, and have exhausted the local opportunities? West Coast Motors²⁵ run the occasional bus to Lochgilphead, or you could summon a taxi, and there are then two good places to go. First, the Kilmartin House Museum²⁶, café and gift shop which majors on the pretty significant archaeology around the local glen, just reopened in 2023 with a major extension (another bus I'm afraid). The second, is to the Mid Argyll Community Pool (McPool)²⁷ in Lochgilphead.

²¹ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

²² <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/argyll/dounie-castle.shtml>

²³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39164/castle-dounie>

²⁴ <http://savethepuffer.co.uk/>

²⁵ <https://www.westcoastmotors.co.uk/>

²⁶ <https://www.kilmartin.org/>

²⁷ <https://macpool.org.uk/>

I am slightly surprised there is no plaque anywhere hereabouts to commemorate the shipwreck of the Comet. She was built on the Clyde in 1812 and provided the first commercially successful paddle steamboat service in Europe, initially between Glasgow, Greenock and Helensburgh, and later on the Glasgow to Fort William run through the Crinan Canal. But in December 1820 she didn't make it through the Dorus Mòr (the big door) and was wrecked off Craignish Point, not a good time of year to be out and about at dusk with wind against tide in a snowstorm, and not enough horsepower for her paddles. Fortunately all and crew survived the experience (there were no passengers)²⁸. The ship itself split in two and was lost, despite efforts at salvage. Although her engine is presumably on the seabed somewhere, her earlier engine is now in the Science Museum in London.

Apparently one old Clyde skipper when he saw the Comet remarked: "Kneel doon and thank God that ye sail wi' the Almichtie's ain win', and no wi' the de'il's fire and brimstone, like the splutterin' thing there" which in translation is: "Kneel down and thank God that you sail with the Almighty's own wind, and not with the devil's fire and brimstone like the spluttering thing there".

Cullipool

Cullipool²⁹ is yet another spot that I, and no doubt others, have sailed straight past countless times while hurrying with the tide either up or down the Sound of Luing, perhaps inhibited by the slightly tricky-sounding entrance and exposure to the west. But in fact it is a snug anchorage in an easterly wind, with stunning views across to Mull and the islands of Nether Lorne. Not so good when the wind swings round a bit to the south, even on the visitor moorings which I think are too exposed and too far out (possibly no longer there). There is a rather rickety metal pontoon you can land on rather than the slippery and rocky shoreline.

Ashore there is quite a large gaggle of early 19th century cottages built for the slate quarrymen. The whole place is steeped in slate — a still-solid slate pier, abandoned and flooded slate quarries (this would be a scary place to bring up young children), crazed looking cliffs left over from blasting, bits of slate all over the place. In the end it finally all closed down in 1965 (in 2022 there were very early plans to restart at least some minor slate quarrying). Walk north through the village as far as you can go. On your way, about 200 yards from the harbour, look out for a steel gate with a small sign proclaiming the 'Isle of Luing railway company'. Nigel Dyckhoff had set up a charming model railway in his garden, but sadly it is no more.

The new in 2015 Atlantic Islands Centre³⁰ is, quite rightly, getting excellent reviews. Although the exterior is a bit functional, inside it is calm, light and welcoming with a combination of social centre for the island, heritage exhibition, work-spaces, and a very nice café/restaurant with a tempting lunch menu (ph 01852 314096). I can only vouch for the coffee and cakes. Open late for dinner on Saturdays, but as ever check before making a detour, particularly in these post Covid days.

Otherwise there is nothing of great interest except the charm and friendliness of a small island with no pub or hotel, still without the controversial fixed-link across Cuan sound to Seil island, a population of roughly 200. Sadly the primary school is now mothballed and likely to close for good. The few children left on Luing now have to get themselves to Easdale primary school. And —

²⁸ https://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/images/stories/pdfs/Wreck_of_the_Comet.pdf

²⁹ <https://isleofluing.org/about-isle-luing>

³⁰ <https://isleofluing.org/atlantic-islands-centre>

amazingly perhaps — there is an amateur dramatic society. Also amazingly there is a bakery, Mary Braithwaite and Nigel Ings's Luing Bakery sells its cakes and other goodies in the island shop, up the road to the right after you go ashore (make sure to buy your provisions there, it needs your support)³¹. Which all goes to show where a PhD in archaeology and anthropology can take you.

Easdale

Easdale sound may be shallow and a bit tricky, but it is definitely worth stopping here to look round Easdale Island³². This tiny car-less island once held a community of several hundred who were involved in slate mining, as they were at Ellenabeich across the short ferry ride to the mainland. Until in 1881 a storm breached the rock and masonry wall between the main quarry at Ellenabeich and the sea. By the time of the First World War all slate production had ceased, and the island community gradually disappeared, down to just four residents. But, gradually since the 1950s, the ruined workers' cottages have been taken over and restored by a new local community who are working hard to restore many of the island facilities, such as the drying harbour. And they are encouraging others to join them, in part by producing a short film³³ on YouTube in 2015. Now apparently over half the population is resident.

Everywhere you go there is slate — walls, piers, jetties, roofs, and under your feet. The early 19th century quays and jetties built of vertically orientated slate are particularly notable — and beautiful. Not surprisingly, given the whole place is made of slate, the annual world stone skimming championships³⁴ have been held here since 1983. Twenty countries were represented in 2015, including Zimbabwe and Pakistan, with up to a maximum of 350 competitors in total — so called 'chuckers'. But unless they understood colloquial English, I doubt if the non-English speakers would have appreciated the innuendo of being called 'tossers', or indeed of the final 'toss off'. I would qualify as 'an old tosser'. Entry £10 for adults, £5 for under 15s. Dougie Isaacs from Blairgowrie was the men's World Champion in eight out of 12 years, until in 2017 a Japanese man was the surprise winner (he was the Japanese champion so hardly a beginner). Then a Hungarian won the men's in 2018, and again in 2019! The organisers are trying to buy the venue, a flooded quarry, from the island's owner who at the moment charges the championship organisers a hefty fee.

The new(ish) community hall is a bit of an architectural mishmash — a combination of slate, wood, and lead roofing does not guarantee aesthetic success. I have not however seen the inside. Nonetheless, incorporated into this modern building, the Puffer Bar, Restaurant and Tea Room³⁵ is a good combo (ph 01852 300022), but its future is uncertain (the pub is to be converted into a home). You were able to sit outside at tables admiring the view to Mull while eating cream teas, and watch the children swing on the swings The bar was small and cosy, but with no real ale which is no great surprise given the small population to drink it up before the barrel goes off.

Make very sure to walk round the island to see the flooded quarries which are separated from the sea by just a few feet of rock. There are loads of blackberries everywhere. The old cottages seem mostly restored now, and very charming they look too, many with gardens stuffed with flowers and shrubs. An old lamppost on the green seems to have been taken or stolen from 'The City of Lincoln'.

³¹ <https://isleofluing.org/atlantic-islands-centre/isle-luing-home-bakers>

³² <https://www.easdale.org/index.htm>

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvXcZ110ngk>

³⁴ <https://www.stoneskimming.com/>

³⁵ <http://pufferbarandrestaurant.co.uk/>

The small folk museum is a treasure and a delight³⁶. It was set up in 1980, and gradually put together lovingly over many years by Jean Adams who received an MBE for her efforts, much more deserving than the rather higher honours dished out to politicians and indeed to various colleagues, often for no discernable reason other than doing their job well. She retired in 2006 and since then the museum has been owned by Eilean Eisdeal, the island's community development group set up in 1997. There are lots of original letters, objects of various sorts, and clippings from the Oban Times. Great!

Ellenabeich (Isle of Birches) is in fact no longer an island, it was quarried away. But the name lives on as the village on the Seil island side of the sound. Here there was once a vast emporium of interconnecting caverns of tartan tat, the amazing and unique Highland Arts Centre. However, in 2017 the building was sold to Seafari³⁷ who plan to convert it into a boat shed, maybe with other facilities too. They run many of those tourist RIBs you see dashing round the nearby islands and are based here, a rather successful business it seems. They must be the successors of the *"very able, extremely dextrous, and willing clever seamen"* that The Hon Mrs Sarah Murray came across here at the end of the 18th century when writing probably the first travel guide to Scotland³⁸.

The Arts Centre was started by the late C John Taylor, an Englishman, with I would say dubious artistic talents, and a self-proclaimed poet as well as composer. When a coach rolled into the car park an elderly gent shouted, in a Yorkshire accent "ere coums a bous"! And a kilted youth stopped putting a ball on the green, picked up his bagpipes and let out a blast to welcome the tourist throng who were then disgorged from the bus into the emporium to emerge later with Scotland tea towels and plastic models of Robert the Bruce.

The cottages in the village are charming, presumably mostly holiday homes and lets. In one you will find the Slate Islands Heritage Centre³⁹ run by a trust with a very informative website. Started in 2000, it is small but packed with interesting stuff, not just slate-related, so donate generously. Quite a lot of the village is now owned not by some distant landlord but by the Seil and Easdale Community Council.

The Oyster Bar and Restaurant⁴⁰ does pub grub and real ale (maybe), but it seems to change hands rather frequently so it's hard to keep up with how it's doing or even whether it is still there in these difficult post Covid/cost of living crisis days (ph 01852 300121).

There is also a beautiful garden created in the 1930s — An Cala⁴¹ — just along the road out of the village. It is small, charming and domestic. A lovely waterfall tinkles down a cliff and there is a wonderful summerhouse or temple with walls covered in patterns of pine-cones from all over the world. And look out for the flock of wire sheep. The house itself is actually a combination of three 19th century cottages which were converted into a single very nice looking house in the 1930s giving *"an almost incongruous anglicised intimacy"* according to Pevsner⁴². Thank you Mrs Downie

³⁶ <https://www.easdalemuseum.org/>

³⁷ <https://www.seafari.co.uk/>

³⁸ 'A companion and useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland, and the Hebrides' first published in 1803 was probably the first travel guide to Scotland, written by a quite posh but very adventurous English lady, the Hon Sarah Murray. Characteristic of her period, she rather overused the word 'sublime'.

³⁹ <https://slateislands.org.uk/the-heritage-centre/>

⁴⁰ <http://www.oysterbareasdale.com/>

⁴¹ <https://www.parksandgardens.org/places/an-cala>

⁴² Pevsner *ibid*

for sharing all this with us for a mere £5 a head — so unlike the owners of Torosay Castle on Mull, Achnacloich on Loch Etive and Jura House who have closed their gardens to the public.

And finally, much of the film⁴³ of Gavin Maxwell's famous otter book, 'Ring of Bright Water', was filmed around here.

Eilean Dubh

Columba landed on many of the islands in Argyll, so we are told, but not on this pair as far as I know — Eilean Dubh Mòr (i.e. big black island) and Eilean Dubh Beg (i.e. small black island). Maybe there are no suitably uncomfortable monastic caves although there is a rather snug and more-or-less invisible cave under the bracken just under the crags south of the anchorage, and another one near the shore overlooking Scarba. The two islands are covered with heather and bracken, with a great all round view from the top of Eilean Dubh Mòr, the more varied of the two — from the cliffs of Mull, up the Firth of Lorne, across to Easdale and Cullipool, over Lunga to Luing, across to Scarba, Colonsay in the distance, and finally to the Garvellach Islands in the foreground. There always seem to be seals in this anchorage, and in the spring you have to avoid treading on the great black backed gull eggs and chicks.

Fladda

With care, this can be a surprisingly reasonable anchorage out of the tide, at least on the flood, off the north of the island from where you can dinghy across to the old landing slip. And then explore. But don't leave your boat unattended for too long, and almost certainly don't stay the night — the ebb could land you on the rocks. Not that there is much to explore. The large walled garden is overgrown, and the lighthouse cottages rather run down. Of course the views all around are great. I never knew why sometime in the 20th century, the name of the island changed from Pladda to Fladda until the present owner told me the Northern Lighthouse Board was responsible — to avoid confusion with their lighthouse on the other Pladda, off the south tip of Arran in the Clyde.

Gallanach Bay

This bay opposite Crinan is a nice spot in northerly weather, always much quieter than off the hotel, and there is a pleasant walk to the dramatically situated Duntrune Castle,⁴⁴ still showing much of its 15th and 16th century origins (the website is exceptionally friendly). It is privately owned by the chief of Clan MacCallum. There are holiday lets, and it is possible for interested people to look around the castle by appointment (ph 01546 510271). It claims to be the oldest continually inhabited castle in Scotland.

Across the road away from any salt water spray you will find the castle's charming small garden to meander in, with classical statues and tinkling water, looked after by Cristophe Lefevre (donation expected). Here you will see an early 20th century heliochronometer, an instrument which was used to tell the time from the sun (before the BBC time signal which started in 1924). It is far more accurate and reliable than conventional sundials apparently, and you can still buy them.

⁴³ <http://www.scotlandthefilm.com/movies/fring.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.duntrunecastle.com/>

Gallanachbeg

There is no yachtie subculture here, rather a diving subculture. The Puffin Dive Centre⁴⁵ dominates the bay so if you want to hire diving kit, be taught how to dive, go diving from one of their boats, buy stuff from their dive shop, or top up your own cylinders, this is your place. More usefully for us, they would also retrieve a stuck anchor — for a fee. In truth it is a pretty dull spot and I don't see much point in anchoring here.

Ganavan Bay

Ganavan bay seems to be a magnet for folk who sit in their cars and watch the sea, or take their dogs for a walk. It is an anchorage of sorts but I have never anchored here, or ever seen any other boats anchored here — it is too exposed to the west, and there are far handier places nearby. And although this must be a lovely town beach for Oban, and very clean, it is hardly worth the bother for anyone with a boat who can get to much nicer places. Actually I am not sure it is so lovely now. Since I first started this guide a developer has sprinkled really horrible glaring-white houses around on the larger — more northerly — of the two beaches. They look awful and seem to have almost no gardens. The memorial to coastal command in the 2nd World War has been nearly pushed into the sea by this dire creeping development (Sunderland and Catalina flying boats were based in Oban Bay and used to track down German U-Boats in the Atlantic). In January 2012, to add climatic insult to architectural injury, most of the sand got washed away by a major storm, but it returned naturally without the help of human hand or digger. Nowadays there is a threat of even more housing.

The rather nicer, smaller and southern beach has some historical interest (so-called Little Ganavan beach). Like many other places along this coast, there was a lot of activity here during the Second World War — an anti-submarine indicator loop⁴⁶ ran along the seabed to Craignure on Mull. The idea was that enemy submarines passing over it would induce an electric current which would be picked up on the shore. A few concrete huts from that period are still there, one of which can be seen from the sea just south of the main beach.

Garvellach Islands

On old charts the Garvellach Islands⁴⁷ are called 'The islands of the sea', a more romantic name for this string of small uninhabited islands in the Firth of Lorne. It seems as though the sun always shines on them, but this is simply because one never lands unless the weather is settled. And well worthwhile it is too. The all-round views from the top of Eileach an Naoimh⁴⁸ (Isle of the Saints), where the main anchorage is, are fantastic, as though you are on the bridge of a ship steaming up the Firth of Lorne (from Ben Nevis to Ben More to Ireland to the Paps of Jura).

And there are some wonderful piles of old stones — early Christian bric-a-brac (St Columba and all of that of course, apparently the oldest Christian buildings in Scotland, and possibly the UK). First up, very close to the anchorage you will encounter a double beehive where monks were supposed to have lived and prayed. It is all well signed by Historic Environment Scotland. Further up the hill

⁴⁵ <https://www.puffin.org.uk/>

⁴⁶ <http://indicatorloops.com/obanbay.htm>

⁴⁷ <https://www.southernhebrides.com/the-garvellachs/>

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileach_an_Naoimh

to the left there is a large monastic site⁴⁹ — most impressive and peaceful, said to have been founded by St Brendan the Navigator in the 6th century. Sit here and brood on how those early Christians survived on such a remote island. There is a well for water, but what did they do about food, and heating? Your children should search for and explore the underground cell (through the gate in the metal fence, 50 metres)!

There is a burial ground — Cladh Dhuban — just by the somewhat minimal anchorage on Garbh Eileach.

And finally, there is clearly an old castle, 13th century, on Dùn Chonnuill,⁵⁰ the most northerly of the islands. This is an anchorage only for the calmest of days and even then just for a lunch stop and brief explore ashore if you can cope with the awkward landing. Near the natural harbour on the east side there is some evidence of an abandoned settlement, however the most interesting remains and views are found at the top of the island. It is a bit of an awkward scramble up the steep bracken and nettle-strewn hillside, but once on top there is evidence of the ancient fort marked on the chart. You can see why it was such a good military spot with a commanding view across the southern reaches of the Firth of Lorne.

Gylen Castle Bay

Gylen Castle Bay in other than southerly winds is a very pleasant anchorage with views down the Firth of Lorne. A particularly rugged 16th century castle is set high on a cliff. It was reduced to a ruin less than a century later, as a result of yet another of those violent Hebridean clan arguments. It has fairly recently been sympathetically stabilised and is looked after by Historic Environment Scotland. There are excellent garderobes to fascinate the children, and a lovely oriole window above the main door — with interesting carvings, and a removable floor so that boiling oil, or whatever, could be poured on to the heads of the attackers. But the intrusive in-your-face signage on the landward side is terrible, it destroys the view as you approach. The Kerrera Tea Garden⁵¹ is even closer from here than from Little Horseshoe Bay (see below). There are plenty of other anchorages to escape to if the wind gets up. This is just one more of the several anchorages on the very attractive small island of Kerrera⁵².

Little Horseshoe Bay

This is a better anchorage than it once was because back in the 1930s it was obstructed by the pontoons of lobster fishermen. Long before that the Vikings gathered just north of here, in Horseshoe Bay, on their way to the Clyde and their final comeuppance at the hands of the Scots at the Battle of Largs in 1263.

The old decaying wooden hulk on the beach enhances the scene in a rather nice way, and doubles up as a wrecked pirate ship with treasure (what on earth happens to plastic hulks, there must be thousands of them somewhere?). From the anchorage, scramble up to the site of an old iron age fort at the top of a little flat knoll on the south arm of the bay. A few grassy lumps on its south side

⁴⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22361/garvellachs-eileach-an-naoimh>

⁵⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22374/garvellachs-dun-chonail>

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/kerrerateagarden/>

⁵² <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/kerrera/kerrera/>

presumably cover the remains of the defensive walls.⁵³ From here there are charming views up and down the Sound of Kerrera.

One of the small cottages by the anchorage was once taken over by the only parrot sanctuary in Scotland — one was not surprised to hear distant squawks more reminiscent of Treasure Island than the Hebrides when you anchored. In 2010 there were 60 birds in various stages of distress, or well-fedness, courtesy of Yvonne MacMillan who was clearly passionate about looking after them. The trouble was that by 2011 the sanctuary was full and she could only take more birds if one of her resident birds died. This is the same classic capacity problem we have in medicine — to see more new patients in out-patient clinics we have to discharge follow-up patients to make space, otherwise no new patients get seen. Not surprisingly some discharged follow-up patients become disgruntled, and with good reason if their GP cannot provide the sort of care they were getting in hospital. Sadly, in 2015 it looked as though the sanctuary was going to be closed and the parrots rehoused on the mainland. By 2016 it was all gone.

On a windless day with no sailing you could walk the circuit around the lower two thirds of the island.⁵⁴ It is seven miles and takes about three hours or so, more if one stops off at the excellent Kerrera tea garden⁵⁵ which is only about a mile from the anchorage. Strangely the owners have removed the outside tables, and closed the atmospheric sitting room in an old barn. Instead, they take your orders at the gate and then you go and sit up on the hillock by the bunkhouse (in the open). There is a nice free-standing toilet to try, twinned with a toilet in Pakistan. The bunkhouse is where my son Oli and his friends celebrated his 21st birthday — certainly an unusual venue.

Because no one comes to the tea garden by car, and most have to walk the two miles from the ferry, one wonders how it makes enough money to keep going, but maybe that is not the point — it certainly has nothing of the feel of a mere money making operation, about as far away from those awful casino banks and their bonus-waving bankers as one could imagine (ph 07951 964231). As ever beware certain days it may be closed, and I think it usually opens 11-4.

This anchorage was clearly a favourite of CC Lynam's who even on Christmas Day 1901 *"bathed and found the water quite warm"*⁵⁶ But in 1904 he complained that *"the loveliness of the pretty spot is not enhanced by the row of three new cottages just built on the shore"*. These days we of course find them rather charming.

By 2019 the population of the island had risen to 65, including 19 children, encouraging. And attempts are being made to convert the now redundant school near the ferry terminal into a

⁵³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22949/kerrera-the-little-horse-shoe>

⁵⁴ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/argyll/kerrera-gylen.shtml>

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/kerrerateagarden/>

⁵⁶ The Log of the Blue Dragon 1892-1904. C C Lynam, AH Bullen, London, 1907. Amazing and amusing account of cruises in the Hebrides, often in winter and sometimes single-handed, with many groundings, cock-ups and near misses. The 25ft centre-plate engineless yawl was built in land-locked Oxford, sailed down the Thames, round Lands End and up to Scotland, and the author "never had a paid hand on board, and never but once signalled for a pilot"! He was an unconventional and no doubt inspirational headmaster of the Dragon School in Oxford, which is why his cruises were all in the school holidays (these days I like to think he would have taught in a comprehensive school). He didn't like Cowper's Sailing Tours at all: "His knowledge of the west coast and its people is gathered from two hurried cruises and merits rather the name of ignorance contains nothing useful that is not taken from the official Sailing Directions."

community centre. By 2021 a new 'road' (in truth a forestry-grade Land Rover track) had opened, so connecting the communities in the north and south ends of the island.⁵⁷

Loch Beag

There is nothing particular to do or see here, although walking to Craignish point is a possibility — for great views south to Scarba and Jura. There are otters around below the old ferry house next to a broken-down jetty and crane (maybe the crane has gone now). I think a ferry used to run from here to Jura. Up the loch you can see the architectural muddle of Craignish castle, but it is not worth a visit. It is privately owned and has been converted into apartments. 'Pevsner' regards it as '*a clumsy confection concocted by repeated conversions*'⁵⁸, so there you have it. The building ranges from 15th century through the 19th to the 20th. What is of more interest, but it is bit further, is the old parish church of Kilmarie, on the road towards Ardfarn, but this is nearer to the Bàgh Dun Mhuilig anchorage on Loch Craignish.

Loch Feochan

There really seems little particular to do or see around this loch. Furthermore, the main road between Oban and Lochgilphead runs along one shore which makes it noisy. But the entrance is quite fun, much easier since it was buoyed some years ago. In the old days, as Frank Cowper put it "*As this loch is barred in two places, and twists considerably with a very narrow channel, I don't think it is suitable for a general cruise.*"⁵⁹

On the port side, just before the suddenly shallow bit, the single white cottage was used for the film of Ring of Bright Water⁶⁰ (based on the classic otter book by Gavin Maxwell). It is now a pricey holiday cottage. Ardoran Marine⁶¹ in Ardentallen Bay is a smallish boatyard and there are visitor moorings (ph 01631 566123). You can walk from here up to 'The Barn'⁶² — through the farm, up the road, and then up a track to the left, just over a mile. It is a slightly eccentric pub in a converted cattle byre with good food, and holiday chalets (at Cologin on the OS map) (ph 01631 564501)

⁵⁷ <https://isleofkerrera.org/overview>

⁵⁸ Pevsner. Ibid.

⁵⁹ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today. His obituarist in *Yachting Monthly* wrote in 1930: "From his earliest days Mr. Cowper took cruising to heart and probably did more to popularize this particular way of life than any man of his day. It is almost inconceivable to us now the prejudice which then existed in the public mind against the man who did not employ hands aboard his yacht. But it was through this veteran singlehanded sailor's adventures and writings that the public began to recognize small yacht cruising as a sane man's pastime".

⁶⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cvop3ayFwBA>

⁶¹ <http://www.ardoran.co.uk/>

⁶² <https://www.cologin.co.uk/>

Oban

I personally like the brassy breeziness of Oban⁶³. It is of course very much a holiday town, as it always has been since the early 19th century, but it is also a ferry terminal with the feel of people coming and going to both the Inner and Outer Hebrides. Since the pontoons ⁶⁴ appeared in 2017, it has become much more yacht friendly than it had been for years. But I would not want to be on those pontoons in a south-westerly gale, they are not exactly cheap, and you can feel as though you are in a bit of a goldfish bowl. There is now quite an informative harbour website.⁶⁵

Personally, I prefer the visitor moorings ⁶⁶ with a loading pontoon which are near the Oban Sailing Club, but maybe they are a bit far from the station and shops —15 minutes walk into town for all your provisions at Tesco, Lidl, Aldi or Marks and Spencer which are clustered together to the south of the Railway Station. These moorings are good, but not all that sheltered in a blow. At the moment, I don't think there is anything to stop you anchoring off the Corran Esplanade, but here the problem is wash from the CalMac ferries which dominate the bay, and it is not easy finding a good spot. I can sympathise with CC Lynam who back in 1904 lamented "*Oh, why oh why do I ever stay a night on the Oban side?*"⁶⁷ But in those days he had the options of anchoring over in Ardantrive bay (see above) long before there were any pontoons or mooring charges, or off the 'Brandystone' which is now full of private moorings near the Oban Sailing Club. You might prefer to base yourself at Kerrera Marina⁶⁸ (ph 01631 565333) across Oban Bay. However that does require the inconvenience of a water taxi to get to the town.

Oban is a good place for shops. There is a butcher, Watt and Son fishmongers on the railway pier, outdoor shops, galleries for arts and crafts, Highland Fasteners tool shop on Stevenson St, Screwfix in Mill Lane, as well as the supermarkets. It is after all the second biggest town on the west coast after Fort William. It is also handy for meeting crew off the train or bus, and catching up on civilisation. But sadly there is no chandlery since Nancy Black's closed in 2017. Unfortunately, Oban has form in self destruction — those of us old enough to remember the airy, glass-roofed late 19th century railway station will not forgive its replacement in the 1980s with such boring modern buildings. Tobermory is an alternative for provisioning, after all it is likely to be on your way to or from Oban.

There are some very good restaurants in Oban. My own favourite is The Waterfront Fishhouse Restaurant⁶⁹ (ph 01631 567415) on the Railway pier. Really excellent for robustly cooked fish. "From pier to the pan as fast as we can" is their slogan. The menu is simple and fairly brief, and the food is brilliant. Roy Stalker has been head chef since 1999. It may be in a very unpromising looking building, up some stairs in what was once the Mission to Seafarers, but there are great views across the north entrance of Oban Bay. So book a table by the window overlooking the pier and watch the Isle of Mull Ferry come and go while you eat. But be careful, it can get very busy and noisy on some evenings, and they don't take children in the evening. Ee-Usk on the North Pier (ph 01631 565666)⁷⁰ is a more upmarket fish restaurant (again, no children in the evening). Next door is the

⁶³ <https://www.oban.org.uk/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.northpierpontoons.com//>

⁶⁵ <https://obanharbour.scot/>

⁶⁶ <https://obanbayberthing.co.uk/>

⁶⁷ C C Lynam *ibid.*

⁶⁸ <https://kerrera marina.com/>

⁶⁹ <https://waterfrontfishhouse.co.uk/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.eeusk.com/>

more family-orientated Piazza⁷¹ with excellent pizzas, not too big, and good for kids. They will do any pizza as calzone which gets you some salad too, at the same price (ph 01631 563 628). From both restaurants the views over the bay and of the ferries are great (mind you the architecture on the North Pier is legolandish, best seen from the inside out). Coast⁷² is another good restaurant, but suffers by having rather dull decor and no view of the sea (ph 01631 569900). Again no children in the evening. The Manor House Hotel⁷³ is the attractive Georgian building by the visitor moorings, for a slightly formal and more expensive candle-lit dinner (ph 01631 566429). Their bar is open to non-residents. The lovely view of the bay is somewhat constricted by some unsympathetic modern houses on one side, and by the much more attractive buildings of the Northern Lighthouse Board⁷⁴ on the other.

For a delicious seafood sandwich you can do no better than the so-called 'Green hut' on the railway pier — known as the shack — just by where the CalMac ferries berth (opened in 1990 by legendary Oban character John Ogden who died in 2023). There is a separate and more recent operation opposite the station entrance. For coffee and a bun there is, among many, many other cafés, Julie's⁷⁵ opposite the distillery. And somewhat slimmed down, the Oban Chocolate Company along the esplanade.⁷⁶ In 2014 Costa Coffee opened near the station with the usual rhetoric about employing local people (and the usual really boring decor and furniture). You have been here hundreds of times already, in airports and shopping malls. Let's hope they don't force out the local cafés.

The War and Peace Museum⁷⁷ (ph 01631 570007) opened in 1995, and at times has teetered on the brink of insolvency. However, it is now more secure and worth a visit — and a donation because it is free — if for no other reason than to get an idea of how surprisingly important Oban was in the Second World War, mostly as a base for antisubmarine flying boats (the museum features war rather more than peace). Many of the volunteer staff seem to be ex-servicemen, and they are always keen to yarn about the old days — and very informative they are too, much better and of course more interactive than one of those audio machines that museums now give you to talk you round their exhibits. As volunteers they do come free, at least for as long as they remain standing (in the meantime someone should be and probably is recording their stories).

The Atlantis Leisure Centre⁷⁸ has good facilities for the family on a wet day. There is an adult 25-metre pool which is a bit cold (and has a flume), a toddlers' pool which is a bit warm, a bouldering cube, a soft play area, tennis, squash, Badminton, table tennis, basket ball, a gym and of course a café (ph 01631 566800).

There is also a cinema for a wet day — the Phoenix⁷⁹. It too rose from the ashes after it burnt down in the 1950s, closed in 2010, but in 2012 it reopened as a community-owned arts venue. In 2013 a second screen was added. Terrific. Use it. And don't wait, in 2024 it had to reduce its opening times to save money.

⁷¹ <https://www.piazzaoban.com/>

⁷² <http://www.coastoban.co.uk/>

⁷³ <https://obanmanorhouse.com/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.nlb.org.uk/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.juliescoffeehouse.co.uk/>

⁷⁶ <https://obanchocolate.co.uk/>

⁷⁷ <http://www.obanmuseum.org.uk/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.atlantisleisure.co.uk/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.obanphoenix.com/>

The Corran Halls⁸⁰ host various groups and acts, and there is the Skipinnish Ceilidh House which may offer something more than tartanry of an evening — I don't know.

The Oban distillery⁸¹ is right in the middle of town and takes up a surprising amount of space behind the main street. It is not wildly interesting architecturally. It does tours, of course.

It's hard to find a really decent pub, at least where you can get good real ale in comfortable and congenial surroundings without feeling threatened. Not bad is The Lorne⁸² in Stevenson St, across the main road from Tesco. The bar is rather nice, and they do have Caledonian ales. The Cuan Mòr restaurant and bar⁸³ overlooking the bay, is where you can get Oban beer on draft (it is more of a restaurant than what I would call a proper pub) (ph 01631 565078). If you can cope with the cavernous Corryvreckan⁸⁴ by the ferry terminal, they at least have a selection of real ales (but it is a typical Wetherspoon's). In 2017 and again in 2022 it was awarded the platinum Loo of the Year award — worth a thought if caught short. But the best, I think, is the fairly recently reopened — after many derelict years — Oban Inn⁸⁵ circa 1790 just behind the north pier, right next to the new pontoons (01631 567441). Cosy, traditional, real ale, good food, harbour views from the upper bar, and music.

The late 19th century Colosseum-like 94-arch McCaig's Tower⁸⁶ is the most obvious feature from the sea, Oban's signature really. It is built of granite from the Bonawe quarry. Its originator and funder and designer, John Stuart McCaig, born on Lismore, a banker, died in 1902 before it was completed. It has been left as it was then, best seen from afar, although close up it is rather tidier than it once was, with good views across the bay, no litter and nice shrubs. There are steps up to it from the end of the road by the Skipinnish Ceilidh House. McCaig must have been some sort of pre-Keynsian because it is said that in part his idea was to provide work for local stonemasons in the winter. However, CC Lynam visited *"the strange new round building"* in 1896 and thought he had built it *"in memory of himself"*⁸⁷. Which is indeed true because in his will he instructed that there were to be statues of himself, his five brothers, four sisters, and his parents. But this never happened.

You can walk to the less ivy-covered than it once was, atmospheric and rather spooky ruin of Dunollie castle⁸⁸ on a 7th century site in lovely woods, just at the north entrance to the bay. Actually without the ivy it looks more naked than spooky. 'Pevsner' gets it just right as usual *"Ravaged by time, crag and castle alike struggle to resist the green grasp of parasitic vegetation."*⁸⁹ Most of the ruin dates from the 15th and 16th centuries. It was abandoned in the 18th century. The interior is now open again after stabilisation in 2013-6, which graciously avoided disturbing the European cave spiders which apparently live in the castle walls. There are good views from the courtyard (and now from a second-floor viewing platform), over the bay just as

⁸⁰ <https://liveargyll.co.uk/facility/the-corran-hall/>

⁸¹ <https://www.obanwhisky.com/distillery>

⁸² <https://thelornebaroban.co.uk/>

⁸³ <https://www.cuanmor.co.uk/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.jdwetherspoon.com/pubs/all-pubs/scotland/argyll-and-bute/the-corryvreckan-oban>

⁸⁵ <https://obaninn.co.uk/>

⁸⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McCaig's_Tower

⁸⁷ Lynam *ibid*.

⁸⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23027/dunollie-castle>

⁸⁹ Pevsner *ibid*.

Jules Verne described in *The Green Ray*: "*Nothing could have been more lovely than the panorama formed by the indentation of the bay of Oban, the wild appearance of Kerrera, the isles scattered in the Hebridean sea and the large Isle of Mull, whose rocky western coasts receive the first onslaught from the storms arising from the western Atlantic.*"⁹⁰

The museum in Dunollie House⁹¹ is next door to the castle, opened in 2011. It is small but growing, and has a café. It majors on domestic life in a laird's big house, with some MacDougall family history thrown in and a wonderfully eccentric collection of domestic this and that from the late Hope MacDougall (check out the international wooden spoons!). Started in the 17th century, the T-plan north range was built in 1745, and the main parts of the house were added in the 19th century. In 2013 a six-metre high dome made from willow, along with a seven-metre high tower, was planted. The idea is that it all takes root, flowers, and grows — and grows. Which it is. The lovely deciduous woods behind the house have been leased by the MacDougall family to the Woodland Trust for 99 years at a peppercorn rent.

On the way to the castle you walk along the Corran Esplanade with all its hotels and the truly architecturally awful Corran Halls; the 1957 Christ's Church now a nursery (grade B listed but hardly worth saving); and St Columba's Roman Catholic Cathedral which is a serious landmark but very austere, a Sir Giles Gilbert Scott design from the 1930s (he of Liverpool's C-of-E cathedral, and the red telephone box too). Further on, past various stray bits of volcanic lava plug, past posh-looking 20th century villas with cannons guarding the front door of one, you get to Ganavan Bay and the town beach (see above).

There was no town of Oban when John Knox visited in 1786, but he realised its potential: "*Oban is formed by nature, and by a combination of favourable circumstances, for being a principal harbour, a place of trade, a central mart for the South Highlands, and the numerous islands that lie in its vicinity.*"⁹² And so it is now and, like much of the Highlands, it became a fashionable 19th century holiday destination, egged on by visits from Boswell and Johnson, Wordsworth, Mendelssohn, JMW Turner and Sir Water Scott. So much so that in 1896 Frank Cowper wrote: "*Now we are once more in the presence of beauty and fashion, or the world, the flesh and the devil, as the Catechism neatly puts it.*"⁹³ I am not sure this is still the case but then he added, "*No one stops here, at least not for more than a few days. It's whole season is one of panting, restless bustle. Everyone comes here to go somewhere else.*" Henry Reynolds felt much the same in 1895: "*The town is prettily situated. Rank and fashion were so much to the fore that we could not but be somewhat conscious of the shortcomings of our garb, even when the capabilities of our restricted wardrobes were utilised to their full extent. The only drawback to the place is the great depth of its waters.*"⁹⁴ But there is no pleasing

⁹⁰ 'The Green Ray'. Jules Verne, Luath Press, Edinburgh, 2009. A 19th century romantic novel based on the author's journeys in Scotland, culminating in derring-do on Staffa. Also reads like a travel book, and as such is extremely accurate.

⁹¹ <https://www.dunollie.org/>

⁹² 'A Tour through the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebride Isles in 1786'. John Knox, James Thin, Edinburgh 1975, is what it says on the tin. This was not *the* John Knox, but a Scottish philanthropist eager to set up fishing stations to exploit the untapped — at the time — potential for fishing. He clearly had huge sympathies with the impoverished natives, constantly thinking of ways to improve their lives.

⁹³ Cowper *ibid*.

⁹⁴ *Coastwise Cross-seas, the tribulations and triumphs of a casual cruiser*. Henry Reynolds, J D Potter, London, 1921. Although based on the Deben in Suffolk, the schoolmaster author spent his summer holidays cruising — with no engine — all round the UK, including up to Orkney and Shetland, and round the west

everyone — a couple of decades later, Claud Worth, the London ophthalmologist and sailor, complained that *"...the approaches to Oban have been given such a superfluity of beacons and buoys that there are none left for any other part of the west coast of Scotland."*⁹⁵ And in 1932 Heckstall Smith wrote that although Oban *"has few attractions as a town, it is a most wonderful centre from which to radiate into the finest parts of the Highlands, both inland and by sea as far as the Hebrid Isles."*⁹⁶ I would say much the same today. Finally, in 2010, Shane Spall — wife of actor Timothy — in her lovely two books about their seagoing barge trip round the UK wrote of Oban as *"a small compact place with handsome seafront shops selling postcards, tartan scarves, kilts, haggis, shortbread, umbrellas, pocket mackintoshes and miniature bottles of single malt whisky; not in every shop, just most of them. The others sold ice cream."*⁹⁷ Go and see for yourself!

Oitir Mhòr and Charlotte Bays

On a sunny day the views across to Mull and Lismore are spectacular, but on a bad day I find the inner Oitir Mhòr anchorage more than bleak, and a fish farm does not exactly enhance Charlotte Bay, a feeling that has been heightened by the arrival of an incredibly dull house where once there was nothing. No doubt 'architect designed' as they say. The outer anchorage between Eilean nan Gamhna and Kerrera is much nicer.

The walk to the north end of Kerrera is good, with great vistas out to sea. At the very tip, above the shingle beach in the northwest corner of Charlotte Bay, is a rather subtle historical site — Cladh a'Bhearnaig⁹⁸, called Cashel on the OS map. Apparently there was once a monastery here, now there is just a grassed-over 60-metre-diameter broken circle of old stones which to the untutored eye could have been a big sheep enclosure. These archaeological sites are profoundly unphotogenic.

Continue the walk to a much more in-your-face sight, and that is the view of Oban Bay from the granite obelisk on the hilltop, raised as a monument to David Hutcheson⁹⁹ who died in 1880. With his brother Alexander, and David MacBrayne,¹⁰⁰ he pioneered the first steamship services to the Western Isles, the precursor of CalMac ferries¹⁰¹. The inscription proclaims *"by whose energy and enterprise the benefits of greatly improved steam communication were conferred on the west highlands and islands of Scotland"*. Sit up here on a sunny afternoon taking in the scene, with a slim volume of poetry perhaps.

Of course you can get just as easily to the Hutcheson monument and the archaeology from Ardantrive Bay (see above).

coast, taking in Ireland too. Not much description of the few places he had time to call in on, but he gives an excellent feeling of what sailing was like 100 years ago.

⁹⁵ Claud Worth. 'Yacht Cruising, third edition', 2016. J.D. Potter, London.

⁹⁶ 'Isle, Ben and Loch, from the Clyde to Skye'. S Heckstall Smith, Edward Arnold, London, 1932. An account of gentlemen's yachting where the skipper and pilot were hired, and the Owner ruled the roost. It is very much about this patch of sea, albeit with little information of what there is to do ashore, and in purple prose too, often along with much romantic twaddle about Skye.

⁹⁷ 'The Voyages of the Princess Matilda', and 'The Princess Matilda Comes Home' by Shane Spall, wife of actor Timothy, is charming and funny — a delightful read. Ebury Press, 2012 and 2013.

⁹⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23070/kerrera-cladh-a-bhearnaig>

⁹⁹ <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/mlemen/mlemen046.htm>

¹⁰⁰ <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/eyrwho/eyrwho1205.htm>

¹⁰¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caledonian_MacBrayne

Poll nan Corran

"Old Mother Earth has sprinkled, as from a pepper-pot, I know not how many islands, islets, rocks and reefs, a veritable archipelago, criss-crossed by sounds, channels, gulfs and creeks, a few easily navigable, some only with great care, and others not at all" wrote John McLintock in 1938.¹⁰² Indeed true, there are so many small delightful islands around the west side of the Sound of Luing that it is difficult to prefer one to another.

The special thing about this anchorage on Lunga is the walk to the edge of the Grey Dogs Channel (Little Corryvreckan),¹⁰³ and there to gaze at the tide race and wonder whether to give it a go, as I have seen a 30-foot yacht do, on the flood, admittedly when the sea was calm. At springs the water really does run seriously downhill, and even on a quiet day the whole place has a very unsettling look about it. In fact very few boats seem to attempt this passage, and I certainly haven't. Nor did the tough Corinthian sailor R.T. McMullen in the late 19th century *"After dinner, landed on the island for a stroll, and looked down from a height of 150 feet on the current raging in the narrow channel which divides this island from Scarba; but the scene was neither entertaining at the moment nor a pleasant subject of contemplation for anyone who, if under way, might possibly be forced through it in a calm."*¹⁰⁴

You can also get to the same point by walking from the Camas a'Mhòr-Fhir anchorage (see above), but it is more tedious. The view from the hill on the southwest tip of the island is particularly grand and panoramic and, of course, the wild flowers are fantastic. The anchorage itself is fine too, out of the tide, and you can watch the boats going up and down the Sound of Luing. A bit north of the anchorage there is quite a well-kept looking house, perhaps mostly unoccupied, I don't know. On the next island but one — Rubha Fiola — there was a well-established adventure school, now closed after the manager was jailed for sex offences.

Port Cuthaich (Sound of Kerrera)

This is not in the Sailing Directions so be careful not to stray into the adjacent Port Làthaich where submarine cables are marked on the chart. Instead, aim for Port Cuthaich which provides a very pretty anchorage on sand, obviously only in the right weather conditions — not in a south-westerly gale where the translation from the Gaelic of 'Port Madness' seems rather apt. And watch out for swell. And a warning — beware there is some sort of mooring rope on the seabed fairly near the shore.

Looking southwest to where the horizon is open to the Atlantic, where better to bring ashore the first transatlantic telephone cable — allowing 36 simultaneous voice calls, quite a lot at the time? The first cable was laid over the Atlantic seabed to Newfoundland in 1956, and remained in use until 1978, a rather short time considering the cost and effort involved. It was a remarkable technological triumph of its day, now all but forgotten. The cables are long gone but the remains of

¹⁰² 'West Coast Cruising'. John McLintock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938. Another between-the-wars account of not so much the cruises in chronological order, but of the author's experiences on the west coast. There is too much history, fairy tales and misty Celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nonetheless, it gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing about what sort of boat he sailed, or about the people he met along the way, or about himself.

¹⁰³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yHbJEIwwic>

¹⁰⁴ R.T. McMullen. 'Down Channel', third edition. Horace Cox, London, 1903.

the concrete pipes which enclosed them can still be seen at low tide. Of the three cables on the chart, only the concrete pipe for the one to the northwest is intact, the other two have been broken up but are still visible.¹⁰⁵ Presumably one pipe housed the cable to Newfoundland, and another the cable from Newfoundland. But what about the third? There is yet another concrete pipe a bit further to the southwest, but what was that for? On the shore is the flat roofed and ugly derelict terminal building (apparently full of asbestos), and behind it the closed-off tunnels which took the cables through the cliff.

For a while in the Cold War this very cable was used as part of the hot-line between the USA and the Soviet Union. And you can hear a recording of a stilted and no doubt scripted phone chat between the Canadian Prime Minister and the Queen back in 1961¹⁰⁶.

Port nan Urrachann

Now here is a little hidey-hole on the coast of Scarba¹⁰⁷, not in the Sailing Directions, but good for a lunch stop or waiting for the tide at the Corryvreckan, but not so good for swell. Go ashore and walk 215° and you will find two satisfactory caves to crouch in, or in which to light a fire, with bones. But when the bracken is fully-grown they might be trickier to find than in late May when a cuckoo calls.

Puilladobhrain

Well, it is almost totally enclosed and modestly remote but hardly enough to justify the hyperbole of the Sailing Directions with the inevitable result — too many other boats, always too many other boats except perhaps in the dead of winter. And it will get worse after being voted the most popular West Coast anchorage in 2011. Actually you can strike lucky in the early spring when the banks around the anchorage are awash with early flowers, and herons stalk whatever herons stalk (we were the only boat on March 30th 2016 — sunny, a bit chilly). It is certainly a pretty place and you can potter on the small islands while the children row around safely in the inflatable.

In fact it is not as remote as it looks and feels because it is only a ten-minute walk along a marked track to Clachan Seil, a small community with two things to do: gawp with the trippers at the so-called Bridge over the Atlantic (in truth over Clachan Sound) and then repair to the 18th century Tigh an Truish pub¹⁰⁸ (ph 01852 300242). After being in the same family for 35 years, the pub was sold in 2014. It is cosy, but I'm a bit uncertain about the food these days, at least out of season when I was last there (this may well be an out of date view). And food is not available every night of the week even in season, so check. There is a wonderful old wooden bench around the bar, perfect for sitting and leaning on the bar and drinking their real ales. To a newcomer this pub explains why there is a steady stream of boaties leaving their inflatables on the shore and then heading over the hill.

Tigh an Truish is Gaelic for 'house of the trousers'. Kilts were banned after the disastrous 1745 Jacobite rebellion, so the islanders heading for the mainland are supposed to have stopped off here to change from their kilts into trousers — sounds plausible to me.

¹⁰⁵ https://www.theregister.com/2013/10/14/reg_man_talks_transatlantic_with_tat1/

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1428321148>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.southernhebrides.com/isle-of-scarba/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://tighantruish.co.uk/>

Outside the pub, and seemingly part of the pub operation, are a couple of small outlets for postcards and some local photographs. Self-service with an honesty box.

The bridge, built in 1792-3 with uncertain influences from Thomas Telford, is a very beautiful hump-backed stone structure which is well worth a look, and a photograph.

Gigha

Last updated January 15th 2024



Gigha¹ really is a rather lovely small island, about six-and-a-half miles long by one-and-a-half wide. Farms, wee beaches, four wind turbines, people who smile and wave, and the ferry chugging to and from the Kintyre mainland. In 2002 it famously distinguished itself by a successful community buy-out (at £4 million), putting an end to a series of more or less unsatisfactory recent lairds. But there had been one laird who was loved and who gave the island its crowning glory — the Achamore gardens²: Lieutenant Colonel Sir James Nockells Horlick of the Coldstream Guards whose simple gravestone in Kilchattan burial ground has the memorable epitaph from Isaiah *"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks"*. Since the island has been managed by the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust ³ the population has increased to more than 150. But I fear some of the new housing is not very inspiring. But at least houses are being built to accommodate the increasing population.

There are a lot of anchorages for the size of the island, so one of them is sure to suit the wind conditions. Approaching the island from the east these days is a whole lot easier than in 1896 when Cowper lamented that *"There is absolutely not one single perch, beacon, or buoy, in the whole of this nine miles Sound"*⁴.

¹ <http://www.gigha.org.uk/>

² <https://www.visitgigha.co.uk/Achamore-Gardens>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/isleofgighaheritagetrust/>

⁴ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today. His obituarist in *Yachting Monthly* wrote in 1930: *"From his earliest days Mr. Cowper took cruising to heart and probably did more to popularize this particular way of life than any man of his day. It is almost inconceivable to us now the prejudice which then existed in the public mind against the man who did not employ hands aboard his yacht. But it was through this veteran singlehanded sailor's adventures and writings that the public began to recognize small yacht cruising as a sane man's pastime"*.

Ardminish Bay

Most people who have heard of Gigha know about the gardens⁵ at Achamore House, rebuilt in the late 19th century on the site of an older house, and again in about 1900 after a fire destroyed the top storey. In 2014 it was for sale, £900,000. By 2019 the price had dropped to £750 000, it was sold, and is now a rather nice-looking B&B establishment. It is about 20 minutes walk from the anchorage — and very well worth the effort. The house is in effect a side show to the beautiful gardens which are now owned by the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust⁶. They are set amongst mature trees from all over the world to provide the very necessary windbreak from the salt-laden air of the Atlantic gales. In fact the trees were planted in the early 20th century to provide not a windbreak for plants, but cover for game. Later, in 1944, Sir James Horlick bought the island and, helped by Kitty Lloyd Jones, started planting the hundreds of azaleas and rhododendrons which make the spring and early summer one of the best times to visit. Later, the herbaceous borders and flowering shrubs of the delightful walled garden come into their own. And after that the glorious autumn colours. The whole place is now much better looked after — despite funding problems, and the need for volunteer weeders (at its height Horlick employed up to 10 gardeners). The attractions are signposted with nice touches like the secret passage amongst the bamboos in the walled garden, and notices inviting you to walk on the grass, stroke the pine needles, and touch and sniff the flowers. Perhaps these gardens cannot really compare with Inverewe but nonetheless they are a delight to wander around and sit in, particularly if you are looking for some stable dry land after a rough passage.

Just up the track from the entrance to the gardens you will find the 13th century remains of Kilchattan (St Cathan's) chapel and burial ground, well looked after and restored in 2010⁷. The east gable is complete and has a fine tall window, originally with a pointed arch but now round-headed. There are mouldering medieval graveslabs with carvings which are mostly difficult to make out, as well as modern gravestones, including James Horlick's who died in 1972. A hundred yards further along, and up the rise to the right, is the rather dull but famous 7th century Ogham stone⁸, apparently with an inscription (invisible to me, and certainly incomprehensible even if I could read it as it is written in an ancient linear script, which originated in Ireland, without the use of vowels). The script is named after Oghma, an Irish monk, and was used by monks and scholars for writing secret messages⁹.

Walking back from the gardens to the anchorage you can pause at the late 18th century (with a late 20th century extension) Gigha Hotel¹⁰ for whatever liquid or solid refreshment seems just right for the moment (ph 01583 505254). However it closed in 2023 and the community are trying reopen it. Then a bit further on call in on the Gallery¹¹ to see what they are showing while the kids dabble in paint or nip up to the small play park. Next door the Wee Isle café¹²

⁵ <https://www.visitgigha.co.uk/Achamore-Gardens>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/isleofgighaheritagetrust/>

⁷ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38518/gigha-st-cathans-church-and-kilchattan-burial-ground>

⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38529/gigha-cnoc-na-carraigh>

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogham>

¹⁰ <https://www.gigha.org.uk/Gigha-Hotel>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/gighagallery/>

¹² <https://www.visitgigha.co.uk/Wee-Isle-Caf%C3%A9>

does good ice creams, coffee, burgers and so on. And drop in to GNS (Gigha's Natural Skincare) for potions and creams.

The 'modern' church opposite the shop is worth a look. It was built in the 1920s. Apparently the minister at the time had been an architect and designed it himself. It seems very large for the population but is well kept and there is some good stained glass. The font is medieval, taken from Kilchattan chapel. Carry on north for 20 minutes, lugging your clubs, if you want a game of golf¹³.

Certainly the anchorage is a very handy place to regroup and gather strength, either just before or just after rounding the Mull of Kintyre. There is a 24-hour washing machine and drier with showers and toilets right by the pontoons, plus the Boathouse restaurant¹⁴ which has a very good reputation for snacks, lunch and dinner (ph 01583 505123). There are also mooring buoys for visitors, and the shop is just up the road (but no decent marmalade when I was last there). And bikes for hire.

There are some tiny sandy beaches by the anchorage where children can be safely left to paddle, and the more adventurous can launch their windsurfers.

Caolas Gigha (South Pier)

Apart from looking at Faith, Hope and Charity, the original three wind turbines which were bought second hand in 2004, and since 2013 at Harmony the fourth one too — all of which I find rather attractive and decidedly more pleasing than looking at a coal mine or nuclear power station — there is nothing very special to do or see. But you could walk¹⁵ up to the turbines for the rather grand view, and even to hug them if you are so inclined. They have now paid for themselves and, by feeding in to the national grid, are a considerable source of income for the community. Bear in mind that electricity only came to Gigha in 1955, and yet now the island exports electricity from its community-owned wind-farm to the national grid — progress indeed, both technological and social. Although the electricity on the island has to come from the National Grid not the turbines. On a ridge just to their north you will find two very small standing stones — Bodach and Cailleach¹⁶, meaning the old man and old woman — with a fine view of Jura and the distant coast of Ireland.

Cuddyport

In the right wind conditions this is a lovely spot. It is quiet, there are a couple of small beaches, at least at low tide, and you can easily walk up to Achamore gardens¹⁷ pausing to admire the very pretty garden of the first cottage you come to. There is a bird hide so presumably this is a very birdy sort of a place.

¹³ <https://visitgigha.co.uk/Golf>

¹⁴ <https://boathouseongigha.com>

¹⁵ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/argyll/gigha-south-end.shtml>

¹⁶ <https://megalithix.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/bodach-cailleach-gigha/>

¹⁷ <https://www.visitgigha.co.uk/Achamore-Gardens>

Druimyeon Bay

It may be a good anchorage in westerly weather but it is too far to row to the shore, so I never have. There is not much to see ashore anyway.

East Tarbert Bay

This is a less crowded alternative to Ardminish Bay in westerly weather. It is surrounded by farmland and just up on the road you will find the best standing stone hereabouts — the so-called giant's tooth (the aforesaid fellow lived on Kintyre and got such bad toothache that he pulled out the offending tooth and hurled it over to Gigha! Or was it a pebble from his shoe, or the shoe itself? The stories vary). Another tradition is that it is actually the 'Hanging Stone' where criminals were executed.

Eilean Garbh (and West Tarbert Bay)

Now here is a great anchorage, sheltered from the north if you anchor in the south bay, and from the south if you anchor in the north bay. Both bays have delightful sandy beaches but they can get crowded with bathers and wild campers. It is also worth scrambling up to the top of the 'island' for the views from Ireland to Islay to Jura and up the sound of Jura to Kintyre with the mountains of Arran beyond, and to watch the CalMac ferry ploughing its way from West Loch Tarbert to Islay, rather close it seems to the rocks off the north end of Gigha.

Port Mòr

Sheltered from the southwest but there is little to see or do ashore apart from walk to the Eilean Garbh beach. Better to head round to that anchorage directly (unless it is very crowded which is unlikely). Also there is a quite well-used carpark nearby which rather detracts from the peace and quiet.

Islay

Last updated February 25th 2022



Anyone who knows anything about whisky has heard of Islay¹, even if the only bottle of Islay whisky they have ever seen was in airport shops. There are nine Islay single malts, all but two distilled on the coast, going anticlockwise: Bruichladdich, Bowmore, Laphroaig, Lagavulin, Ardbeg, Caol Ila and Bunnahabhainn. An inland operation started distilling at Kilchoman in 2005, the first Islay distillery to be built for 125 years, and then Ardnahoe in 2018. For myself I don't like the peaty taste of most Islay malts, but luckily for Islay there are a lot of people who completely disagree with my taste in whisky.

But far fewer people know exactly where Islay is, and

even fewer have actually been there. It is quite different from the other Hebridean islands, and not at all like the Highlands except in a few corners, having a character of its own — more rural, farmland, more whitewashed houses, more money around judging by the size of some of the houses, more birds although they are more on the land and not so much at sea, and few castles. And at a bit over 3000 or so, the largest island population. The rich farming land on Islay is not a new observation — in the late 18th century Pennant wrote: *"Perhaps it may seem trifling to mention, that some excellent new potatoes were served up at dinner; but this circumstance, with the forwardness of the hay harvest, shows what can be effected by culture in this island..."* Even earlier, in the 16th century Dean Monro described Islay as *"fertil, fruitful, and full of natural grassing, with maney grate diere, maney woods, faire games of hunting beside everey toun..."*²

¹ <https://www.islayinfo.com/>

² Thomas Pennant. *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides 1772*, Birlinn, Edinburgh 1998, is a surprisingly easy read, far from pompous, and less dated than one might have imagined. He had a real interest in everything he saw from what people farmed and ate, to a bit of history, to the flora and fauna, and more.

Islay has its own brewery³ with five ales. This is particularly good news for Englishmen like myself brought up on proper beer, not caring at all for the sometimes mass-produced Scottish version (there are exceptions like Caledonian IPA, and an increasing number of craft beers). Indeed, after more than 30 years living in Scotland the only things I really miss about England are the pubs with their real ales. Islay has an annual Festival of Malt and Music⁴ in late May, and a jazz festival⁵ in September that should be worth checking out if you happen to be passing.

Although the yachtsman can anchor off every coastal distillery except Laphroaig, the best anchorage has got to be Lagavulin — the entrance is challenging and requires you to keep the 'ulin' of Lagavulin in sight as you approach. You end up right by the distillery and maybe on one of their moorings, the distilling aroma is compelling, and you can easily walk to Ardbeg and get two distilleries for the price of one, as it were.

Ardbeg (Loch an t-Sàilein)

Although you can pick up a visitor's mooring off the Ardbeg distillery⁶ (ph 01496 302244) it is rather exposed and not as attractive as the Lagavulin anchorage. However, there is a delightful walk across the cliffs from Lagavulin where I prefer to anchor or pick up a visitor's mooring (you can walk round by the road which is a bit longer).

The distillery which was started in 1815, and restored in the late 1990s, is definitely worth a visit, particularly for the splendid café which is in an old kiln, and the white painted buildings which are highly attractive. Indeed the buildings were according to 'Pevsner' described by Barnard in 1887 as though constructed "*with no pretensions to taste or elegance, nevertheless...look picturesque and are substantially built*"⁷. Just like they look and are today. The staff are very friendly too, and you can indulge yourself in excellent coffee, lunch or tea. As ever there are tours. Like other distilleries, to get into their website you have to state you are of legal (in the UK) drinking age. How daft, of course anyone can lie about their age. The now deleted home page commented that the distillery was "a worldwide family of Ardbeg aficionados in 90 countries who work tirelessly to drink more Ardbeg"! Didn't sound too good in this day and age of concern about alcoholism.

Bizarrely, Ardbeg has tried maturing their whisky in the orbiting International Space Station. They claim it tastes better than the earthbound equivalent. Good for publicity if nothing else.

³ <https://www.islayales.com/>

⁴ <https://feisile.co.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.islayjazzfestival.co.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.ardbeg.com/en-US>

⁷ 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need for these anchorages are Argyll and Bute by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and Highlands and Islands by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

Ardmore Islands

Here is a veritable archipelago of little islands and skerries. The anchorages are quite far from the land but I don't think you really need to go ashore to experience what this magical place offers. Just sit in the cockpit with binoculars, wait and watch. Or paddle about — quietly — in the dinghy. There are always loads of seals around and you can watch oystercatchers, terns, eider duck, shell duck, swans, herons, deer feeding by the water's edge, and on one memorable occasion we saw a family of otters playing close by on the rocks. Ashore there is not much to do anyway, other than stroll around in the bracken. Ardmore house up on the hill looks forbidding, and rather ugly. A small wind turbine has appeared in recent years, tolerable just about — better than a coal-fired power station.

Bowmore

Bowmore⁸ is a long sail in (and out) but worth a visit, maybe most of all for a first-class meal — at a price — at the Harbour Inn⁹ (the dinning room and conservatory overlook the harbour, which is no surprise, and there are a few rooms as well). It is an attractive mid-19th century building, very cosy inside (ph 01496 810330). It was taken over by the owners of the distillery in 2014.

The town itself, and it is a little town rather than a large village, is the administrative capital of Islay. It has a better Co-op than Port Ellen, along with a hardware shop, butcher, fish van, a general touristy sort of shop (the Celtic House) which has an excellent selection of books, particularly sticking-in books for small children, and so on.

The town was laid out as a grid in the mid 18th century and is one of the few attractive towns in the area (along with Tobermory and Oban). The mostly 19th century distillery¹⁰ which was founded in 1779 (with tours, ph 01496 810441) dominates the bottom of the main street by the harbour while God dominates the top in the remarkable form of Kilarrow parish church¹¹, built in 1767 and described by 'Pevsner' as *"powerfully architectonic in conception and resolutely urban in its rural setting"*¹². It is indeed a striking round shape, and inside it is beautifully elegant with splendid pine pews, and curved stairs up to the 19th century gallery. The central pillar holding the roof up is wooden although it doesn't look it.

The MacTaggart Leisure Centre (ph 01496 810767)¹³ contains Islay's only swimming pool in a rather nice 1991 conversion of a former distillery warehouse right by the harbour (It is owned by the people of Islay and Jura.). You swim under a curved wooden ceiling and can

⁸ <https://www.islayinfo.com/bowmore.html>

⁹ <https://www.bowmore.com/harbour-inn>

¹⁰ <https://www.bowmore.com/>

¹¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37655/islay-bowmore-main-street-kilarrow-parish-church>

¹² 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need for these anchorages are *Argyll and Bute* by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and *Highlands and Islands* by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

¹³ <https://www.islayinfo.com/mactaggart-leisure-centre.html>

look out to the bay through windows at the end of the 25-metre pool. There is a small launderette there too.

The Lochside Hotel¹⁴ is a less expensive food option to the Harbour Inn, but the dining room looks right on to the harbour and the food is fine — the range of Islay whiskies in the bar is legendary and it seems to be the place for music in the evenings (ph 01496 810244). Peatzzeria appeared in 2017, it looks good but have yet to try it (ph 01496 810810).

So all in all not at all a bad anchorage to take a break, and change crew rather than at Port Ellen which, although it has pontoons and is a bit nearer the airport and more convenient for the ferry, is not such a good place to linger in.

Bruichladdich

Bruichladdich¹⁵ village is the distillery¹⁶, built in 1881, and an excellent tour it does too (ph 01496 850190). The distillery had to close down during the two World Wars, went through various owners, and was closed down again in 1993 by Whyte and MacKay. Luckily the distillery was rescued from corporate mothballs in 2000 and became privately owned in exchange for £6.5 million. All the workers had shares in the company, almost everything was done on site with the original Victorian machinery (and nae computers), and their low peat whisky is delicious (the peaty stuff is for others). Well, that is how it used to be until it was sold to Remy Cointreau for £58 million in 2012, and maybe it still is to an extent. How understandable and profitable for the owners and the 60 investors, but how depressing that yet another successful small operation gets swallowed up by a multinational corporate monster. I am of course no businessman so I don't understand these things at all, but I know what I like, and what I don't, and what I am likely to intuitively support. I was once all in favour of this distillery because they sponsored the first Scottish Islands Peaks Race¹⁷ I entered in the early 1990s.

Bunnahabhain

This is sold in the Sailing Directions as a convenient place to wait for the tide south through the Sound of Islay, or as a pause during a journey north. Whatever, I don't think there is much point in blowing up the dinghy because there is nothing much to see ashore other than the rather unattractive late 19th century distillery¹⁸ (with tours as ever, ph 01496 840557). And some equally unattractive houses, mostly rendered grey.

¹⁴ <https://lochsidehotel.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://www.islayinfo.com/bruichladdich.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.bruichladdich.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.scottishislandspeaksrace.com/>

¹⁸ <https://bunnahabhain.com/home>

Caol Ila

This bay is entirely dominated by the distillery¹⁹ and seems to have no merit at all as a place to anchor. Not all distilleries are beautiful buildings, in this case probably because of the rather nasty 1970s architecture which has been added to the ensemble (ph 01496 302769 for tours).

Kilnaughton Bay

It can be more comfortable than Port Ellen to anchor across in Kilnaughton Bay, protected as it is from westerly winds. It has been a bit spoiled by some modern cottages, but the beach is very pleasant to wander along, and the sand is just right for sandcastles. The Carraig Fladda lighthouse²⁰ was built in 1832 — square and stumpy, very much not in the Stevenson style. (If you walk²¹ on just past the lighthouse you come to the so-called singing sands, said to be a delightful beach —Tràigh Bhan.). Up on the dunes there are a surprising number of atmospheric burial grounds. The roofless St Nechtan's chapel²² is late medieval and contains a number of mouldering graveslabs, including one with a rather fine knight in relief.

The military graveyard just to the east of the chapel is remarkably well tended, as these places always are, but contains very few graves. One is of an 'unnamed negro' which is a bit non-PC these days. It is perhaps surprising there are any war graves here, so far it seems from the action, let alone one of a 'negro'. But ships did come to grief around these parts, most notably towards the end of the First World War²³. The British cruise liner the SS Tuscania²⁴ was carrying American troops to Europe when she was torpedoed by a German U-boat in February 1918. Then in October the Otranto²⁵, an armed merchant cruiser, also carrying American troops, collided with another ship and sank. These tragedies are commemorated by the very visible monument on the Mull of Oa, erected by the American Red Cross in 1920.

Lagavulin

Now here is a unique anchorage, once you can understand the Sailing Directions and get through between the two beacons without touching something. If you do have a wee bump, be reassured that you are not the only one — I am another! The anchorage itself is a delightful pool with terns on the rocky islets, views out to the Mull of Kintyre and Ireland, all much enhanced by the white-painted distillery and the decaying castle. To me it will always be the anchorage of my son Oli's boxer shorts which must translate into something nice-sounding in Gaelic — the boy carelessly dropped the dinghy painter from the yacht, immediately stripped off to his boxers, plunged in to rescue the dinghy and ended up with the boxers round his ankles which slowed him down a touch!

¹⁹ <https://www.malts.com/en-row/distilleries/caol-ila>

²⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37631/islay-carraig-fhada-lighthouse>

²¹ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/islay-jura/carraig-fhada.shtml>

²² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37608/islay-kilnaughton-st-nechtans-chapel-and-burial-ground>

²³ https://www.islayinfo.com/lord_robertson_islay_troopships.html

²⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuscania>

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Otranto

The Lagavulin distillery²⁶ began life as an illegal still at least as far back as the 18th century, the present legal distillery was founded in the early 19th century. The product you can buy in every airport booze shop in the world (perhaps not Saudi Arabia). There are formal tours but the men working in the place seem happy enough to give one an informal explanation of the distilling process and a look at the inner works when one goes ashore (ph 01496 302749).

You can easily walk from here to Ardbeg for another distillery, and to Laphroaig²⁷ for that matter, and even on to Port Ellen along the traffic-free South Islay Distilleries Path²⁸.

The mostly 16th century, possibly some bits earlier, Dunyvaig Castle²⁹ is rather more impressive from the anchorage than close up. It was abandoned in the late 17th century. Indeed too close up is discouraged as the ruin is crumbling off its promontory. How our ancestors managed to perch their castles on such small rocky outcrops, guarding important and strategic bits of the coast, is truly amazing. By the way, the shore between the distillery and the castle is full of rubbish so either walk round by the road, or go by dinghy.

The Islay Marine Centre³⁰ opened in 2011 in the bay, very convenient for a chandlery, boatyard, visitor moorings and so on (ph 01496 300129). How such an enterprise is prospering I know not, I haven't had a chance to visit. One can but wish it well.

Laggan

This anchorage is not in the Sailing Directions but it was a favourite of Captain Harvey's in the 1930s. He remarked that the stones on the beach were "*excellent for ballast for the luggers*"³¹. It is in the small bay surrounded by cliffs and hills on the east side of Loch Indaal, half a mile east of Laggan Point, south of Bowmore. I have not been there but the Captain thought it was good for picnics. Clearly it is very open to the southwest.

Loch a'Chnuic

Loch a'Chnuic has nothing of great interest and is right next to the road — not exactly a main road though.

²⁶ <https://www.malts.com/en-gb/distilleries/lagavulin>

²⁷ <https://www.laphroaig.com/en/>

²⁸ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/islay-jura/three-distilleries.shtml>

²⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38002/islay-dunyvaig-castle>

³⁰ <http://islay-marine-centre.com/>

³¹ Sailing Orders. Practical instruction to yachtsman, illustrated by the author's cruises on the West Coast of Scotland. Capt J R Harvey, Alexander Maclehose, London 1935. Well written descriptions of summer holidays on not much money, and even without a 'paid hand' "*my young family and I have always managed somehow*". There is also a lot of technical stuff on charts and how to make them, navigation, compass deviation, how to organise a boat — most of which is not that interesting. But information about many of the anchorages is still relevant. As was so common in those days the engine was unreliable and a lot of time was spent towing the boat with the dinghy, and by horse or even manpower along the Crinan canal.

Nave island

Nave Island I have yet to visit but there are, I am told, the remains of a small rubble chapel³² to be inspected, maybe early 13th century, with a 19th century kelp burners' brick furnace and chimney. Not surprisingly the island is uninhabited.

Port Askaig

Port Askaig³³ looks like an uncomfortable anchorage to me, too much tide and not enough space, so I have never stopped there. However, if you do, the hotel³⁴ sounds OK (ph 01496 840245). There is also a small shop. But in practice it is probably best to let the tide carry on sweeping you up — or down — the Sound of Islay to wherever it is you are heading for

Port Charlotte

Port Charlotte³⁵ is certainly a pretty place, if a rather quiet village. It was founded in the early 19th century as a distillery and agricultural settlement (the Loch Indaal distillery died many decades ago). At one time it was a busy fishing port. There is the excellent Islay Natural History Centre³⁶ in a converted part of the old distillery (ph 01496 850288), particularly good hands-on stuff for children. And the excellent Port Charlotte Hotel³⁷ for tasty bar lunches and suppers, upmarket dinners, and live music (ph 01496 850360) — it also majors on malt whiskies. I have not been to the Museum of Islay Life³⁸ which in 1977 was set up in the newly restored 1843 Kilchoman Free Church, said to be excellent (ph 01496 850358). The lighthouse is a Stevenson, of course, 1869.

Port Ellen

Port Ellen³⁹ is an early 19th century planned village because the laird, Walter Frederick Campbell, wanted to expand employment from just agriculture to fishing and distilling. The first quay was added in 1824 and the lighthouse in 1832. He named the village after his wife Ellinor.

It is the easiest place to flee to on the south coast of Islay, and there are a couple of good shops for provisions (you could stock up in the Co-op), and a hardware store. But, I haven't in the past rated it much as a place to visit — the visitors' moorings were too far out. However, they have been removed in favour of publicly owned non-profit pontoons⁴⁰ within easy reach of what shops there are, but watch out for the shallows beyond those pontoons.

³² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37472/nave-island>

³³ <https://www.islayinfo.com/portaskaig.html>

³⁴ <https://www.portaskaig.co.uk/>

³⁵ https://www.islayinfo.com/port_charlotte.html

³⁶ <https://www.islayinfo.com/islay-natural-history-trust.html>

³⁷ <https://www.portcharlottehotel.co.uk/>

³⁸ <https://www.islaymuseum.org/>

³⁹ <https://www.islayinfo.com/portellen.html>

⁴⁰ <http://portellenmarina.com/>

There didn't seem to be much in the way of a good eaterie until the Islay Hotel⁴¹ was completely rebuilt and opened in 2011. And then rebranded as 'The Islay' which makes me flinch a bit. Personally I don't like the rather open-plan interior, nor the faux marble toilets, and there are no real ales. But the coffee and cakes were good, and the restaurant has grand views and looks enticing enough to give it a try, which I will one day. Overall, smart not cosy I would say (ph 01496 300109). Then, in 2015, the Sea Salt Bistro⁴² and takeaway opened, a very jolly place seemingly run just by women, and good food too — not cheap (01496 300300).

There is a pub, The Ardview Inn, where the piped music is hellish loud. There is no real ale, nor any food when I went, but the Guinness was good, presumably because Ireland is so close. It seems a bit beaten up, but is certainly friendly.

The beach in front of the town would be OK for kids to muck about on. St John's Parish Church at the far end of the beach is worth a look. Built 1897, it is solid, with shining brass and polished wooden pews.

If you do get stuck here, consider getting the bus to Bowmore where there is more to do and see, good shops, and the swimming pool. Or, hire a bike behind the garage next to the hotel and go on your own distillery tour — Laphroaig, Lagavulin and Ardbeg all within easy reach. And the route makes a quite reasonable walk too⁴³.

Port Mòr, Glas Uig, Aros Bay

These three anchorages are all very close together and about equidistant from the most interesting place to visit hereabouts — Kildalton chapel and cross⁴⁴. From Port Mòr, where some rather flashy motorboats are tied up to a jetty by a restored boathouse, there is a track. From the other two anchorages you have to strike out round the small hill. The cross is generally regarded as the best free-standing Early Christian — 8th century — cross in Scotland, and who am I to disagree. It is a bit difficult to make out exactly what the carvings represent but on the east side 'Pevsner'⁴⁵ tells me is the virgin and child, Cain slaying Abel, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and David killing a lion. The late 12th or early 13th century chapel itself is roofless but otherwise reasonably preserved considering it was abandoned at the end of the 17th century. As ever there are mouldering and very old graveslabs, eroded by the elements and the feet of the curious.

Portnahaven

I am not sure about Portnahaven⁴⁶. At the most southwesterly tip of Scotland, and in an idyllic setting, it should be more exotic than it is. Maybe it is too dominated by holiday homes.

⁴¹ <https://theislayhotel.com/>

⁴² <https://www.seasalt-bistro.co.uk/>

⁴³ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/islay-jura/three-distilleries.shtml>

⁴⁴ https://www.islayinfo.com/islay_kildalton_cross.html

⁴⁵ Pevsner *ibid*

⁴⁶ <https://www.islayinfo.com/portnahaven.html>

It is certainly deadly quiet, just a couple of rows of pretty cottages above the bay, with some more modern houses behind. However, there is a cosy pub in what looks more like a private house — An Tigh Seinnse⁴⁷ (the house of singing) — with one rather good real ale when I was last there, from the Islay Brewery (ph 01496 860224). The menu looked enticing, rather more than pub grub, but I have not tried it. Reports are good.

The cottages down by the shore were built in the early 19th century as a fishing settlement, and as somewhere for people to live after they had been 'cleared' from their inland homes. There is a basic village shop and post office. The Parish Church⁴⁸ is a so-called Parliamentary Church, to a standard design by Thomas Telford, built in 1828. It is definitely worth a look inside because it is one of the few Telford Parliamentary churches to have retained its original layout. It is said that one of the two doors in the south wall was for Portnahaven locals, while the other door was for people from Port Wemyss across the fields. The high pulpit is set against the south wall in front of two large windows with lovely views, and the interior decoration is calm and sensible. 'Pevsner' hits the nail on the head yet again with his description of "*pristine and prim*"⁴⁹.

I have not attempted to explore the off-lying island of Orsay but I gather there are some interesting things to see — yet another ruined medieval chapel, and a lighthouse.

Out of the tide and out of the swell it is a pretty idyllic anchorage. But on a bad day it is a dire place to get in and out of with the swell breaking on Orsay and the tide running strongly round the rocks, with a lot of swell. Even on a good day it can be quite daunting. It comes as no surprise that the world's first commercial wave energy generator⁵⁰ was sited half-a-mile up the coast at Claddach, now a decommissioned concrete shell.

⁴⁷<https://www.facebook.com/AnTighSeinnsePortnahaven/?rf=649573301745143>

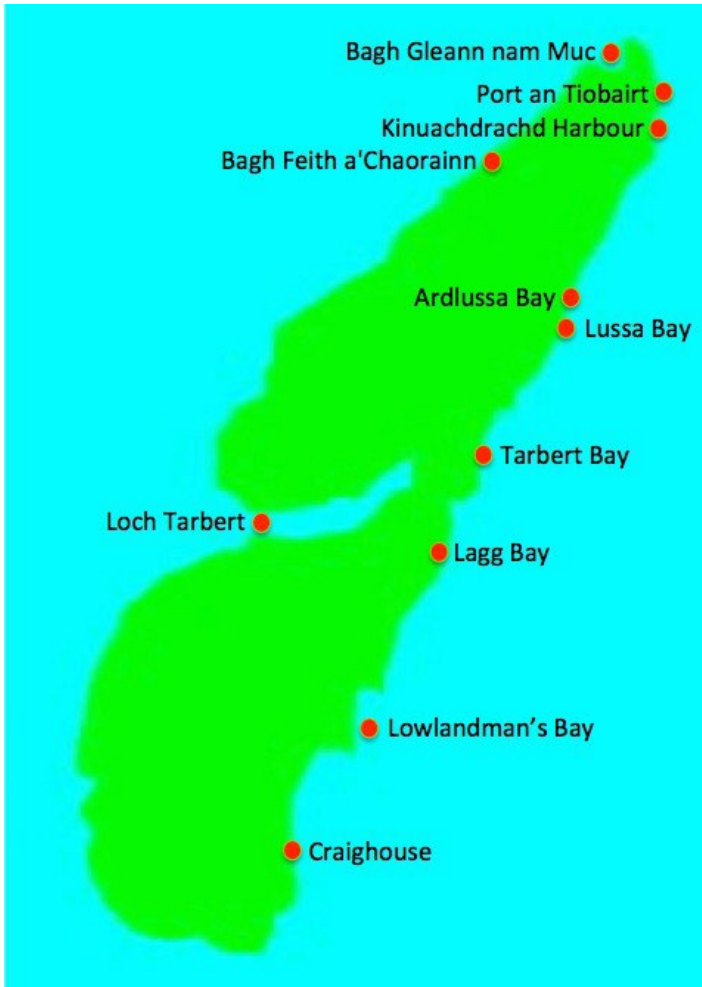
⁴⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37252/islay-portnahaven-and-port-wemyss-parish-church>

⁴⁹ Pevsner *ibid*.

⁵⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islay_LIMPET

Jura

Last updated February 19th 2024



"Intimate as I am with Jura, I have little to say of it, and much less to say in its favour. The distant view of its mountains, remarkable, no less for their conical forms than their solitary reign, leads to expectations that are not realized¹. John MacCulloch's gloomy expectations of Jura in the early 19th century do not apply today. Jura² does indeed have remarkable mountains, but there are far fewer people nowadays (about 200), and there is but one whisky distillery. And the beaches are not all that superficially attractive because they are mostly grey sand. However, the island has a strong sense of community, maybe because there are not that many holiday homes — yet. Local information comes out on Jura Jottings every month on paper. The Jura Development Trust³ has an informative website. And check out the Jura Music Festival ⁴ in September — given the shortage of accommodation you could do well on a mooring. Two anchorages stand out for their remoteness, even though this is still 'only' the Inner Hebrides — Loch Tarbert, a long and intricate loch on

the west coast, and Bagh Gleann nam Muc just off the Corryvreckan at the northwest tip. Finally, listen to Ian MacInnon's Jura and other local reminiscences on YouTube, including going to school with George Orwell's son⁵.

¹ The Highlands and Islands of Scotland, containing descriptions of their scenery and antiquities, Longman 1824, by the doctor and chemist, but mostly geologist, Dr John MacCulloch is rather hard work. It comes in four volumes that can be downloaded free from <http://www.electricscotland.com/travel/highlands.htm>. He himself was not a sailor but he certainly got around in OPBs (other people's boats).

² <https://isleofjura.scot/>

³ <https://juradevelopment.co.uk/news/>

⁴ <http://www.juramusicfestival.com/>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVmkUQolUfE>

Ardlussa and Lussa Bays

These two anchorages are connected by a pleasant 30-minute walk. From the slipway and pier at Ardlussa Bay walk up through the grounds of Ardlussa House (Victorian)⁶ with its wonderful meadow leading down to the sea. Of the seven estates on Jura this is the only one where the owners live all the year round. Hooray for the Fletchers! Estate owners who actually care about and contribute to the island (unlike perhaps the owner of the Ardfin Estate and Jura House who closed the gardens to the public, sold the cattle and laid off the man who looked after them who then lost his home and had to move to the mainland). The Fletchers used to edit the monthly 'Jura Jottings'⁷ and they do very good dinner (BYOB), bed and breakfast, and self-catering. In 2016 Claire Fletcher and a couple of friends started making Lussa Gin, available in the village shop and then all over Scotland and beyond — 7000 bottles a year, and counting!

Then walk on through the early 19th century farm buildings, fork left, along the road through lovely deciduous trees and on towards Inverlussa and Lussa bay, the end of the road where the few cottages were built for the workers at the unsuccessful slate quarry. Shortly before getting there you pass a small burial ground⁸ where you will find the tombstone of Mary MacCrain, died 1856 at the age of 128, so it says. And surprise, surprise by the beach there is a table with a walkie-talkie to summon tea and homemade cakes — and a sign: "Tea on the Beach"⁹. Excellent lemon drizzle cake too! Long may this facility survive. But maybe not available every day at the moment, so best to phone ahead 01496 820053 (if you can get a signal). The beach itself is fine, but typically for Jura it is rather grey sand.

Bàgh Fèith a'Chaorainn

This is a very pleasant bay on the remote northwest coast of Jura, one of several which are described on the Antares charts. The small sand and pebble beach is well hemmed in by the wild Jura landscape of small cliffs and in the summer very thick bracken. This makes exploring much beyond the shoreline difficult. However, it is very scenic so just enjoy sitting still and watching the sunset. There is a local seal colony occupying the tidal islands on the west side of the bay that will treat any visiting yacht with the usual curiosity and suspicion. A bit further south, Glengarrisdale bay is not on an Antares chart but looks doable. The main attraction here is Maclean's cave where the bones of some resident Macleans were deposited after they had been slaughtered by some marauding Campbells in one of those typically Scottish 17th century blood baths. Nowadays, the west coast of Jura is so remote that in the Second World War it is reputed that crew from German U-Boats came ashore to poach a deer or two for their suppers.

Bagh Gleann nam Muc (Bay of the glen of pigs)

This anchorage is more popular than you might imagine, given the tidal difficulties in the area. However, it is a great place to settle down and watch the sunset over Mull, with the rugged rocks all around. Anyway, there is plenty of room for several boats as well as intrepid campers on the beach. The beach itself looks pretty good for a barbeque although watch the swell when getting back in the tender. Walk up one of the small hills to catch the view, and of course

⁶ <https://www.welcometojura.com/plan-your-trip/where-to-stay/ardlussa-estate/>

⁷ <https://jura-jottings.co.uk/>

⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38647/jura-inverlussa-killchianaig>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Tea-On-The-Beach-123292397755283/>

walk round the north point of the island to look at — and listen to — the Corryvreckan¹⁰ (the cauldron of the speckled sea) in full flood (most impressive with a flood tide against a swell from the west).

In September listen to the roaring stags silhouetted on the surrounding hills at dusk — far more deer on Jura than people — about 5000 to 200. Strangely, Pennant reckoned there were only "*about a hundred stags*" on the island in the late 18th century, so either he got his arithmetic wrong or the numbers have increased remarkably¹¹. Also if the numbers were so low, why was the island's name derived from 'dyroe', Norse for deer?

Craighouse

To me, and anyone else who has competed in the Scottish Islands Peaks Race¹², this is a special place because it is where the fleet of yachts come in for the second stop to release their runners over three of the Paps of Jura. I used to do this run myself once, so Craighouse means pain to me. Later I just did the sailing bit, but even that can be a big pain if there is no wind and lots of rowing. Now I have retired from such frivolity although I intend to return as a geriatric competitor in 2024. The two runners are let off in the dinghy to 'enjoy' their run while the three sailors sort out the boat and have a rest. There is no time for any looking around. But, when just cruising and not racing, there is time and there is a lot to do at Craighouse, as well as just sit in the boat at anchor, or on one of the 16 moorings (pay at the hotel), and admire the view of the Paps as clouds swirl about their tops or the sun sets behind them.

This would not be too bad a place to pick up and drop off crew because for now there is a passenger ferry¹³ from Tayvallich (see Loch Sween) on the mainland in summer — you can get to Craighouse from Edinburgh in a total of about five hours, including a coffee stop in Tayvallich. But the ferry only survives on a wing and a prayer, plus a subsidy.

On a quiet sunny day, perch on the wall overlooking the small harbour (a Telford design built in 1812), eat an ice cream from the nearby Jura Community Shop (early 19th Century)¹⁴, gaze at the mountains of Arran over the top of Kintyre, and let the children play on the beach — it may be small and rather scrappy but the children love it nonetheless. Perhaps it is a touch too noisy hereabouts in the summer holidays when there seem to be an amazing number of boats coming and going, including noisy speed boats in good weather. There was once a bit of a cloud over the shop's viability, but in 2012 it was taken over by the Isle of Jura Development Trust¹⁵ who employ a shop manager, and in 2013 they got over half a million from the Big Lottery Fund to help with restoration and rebuilding. Make sure you do your bit and buy your stores there to benefit the local community, they need your custom much more than Tesco does. Wander past the hotel towards the pier to find Camella Crafts, and Konrad Borkowski's

¹⁰ <https://whirlpool-scotland.co.uk/>

¹¹ Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* 1772, Birlinn, Edinburgh 1998, is a surprisingly easy read, far from pompous, and less dated than one might have imagined. He had a real interest in everything he saw from what people farmed and ate, to a bit of history, to the flora and fauna, and more.

¹² <https://www.scottishislandspeaksrace.com/>

¹³ <https://jurapassengerferry.com/>

¹⁴ <https://juracommunityshop.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://juradevelopment.co.uk/news/>

photographic gallery. For delicious bread, phone Kirsty 07734 469268 who supplies the shop on Thursdays and may bake to order if you give her 24 hours notice.

The distillery¹⁶, founded in 1810, makes a pleasant ensemble with the surrounding buildings. The tacked-on manager's house looks like a small castle. There are tours and — of course — a shop for buying you know what (ph 01496 820385). Do not be misled by the 'standing stone' across the road in the small car park — it is a fake, erected by the distillery in 2011.

The Antlers (ph 01496 305317)¹⁷ is a bring-your-own-bottle bistro, café and restaurant in a very nicely restored building. In 2011 it was up for sale and then it too was taken on by the Isle Jura Development Trust who seem determined to keep it going — so use it! Breakfast is formidable, the coffee and cake are good, and there are some crafty things to peruse and buy.

The Jura Hotel¹⁸ built in 1834 has 17 refurbished rooms, a bar, showers round the back (refurbished in 2014), and excellent meals in the public bar, lounge bar, and dining room — try the ultra fresh langoustines (ph 01496 820243). And do try the cakes at teatime. It is all rather cosy with lovely views from the sitting and dining rooms, and the bar, and from some of the bedrooms too — with tropical trees in the foreground as well as the occasional stag at night-time. It was bought by friends in 2010 and so — by definition — it was a success! In 2022, having definitely done their bit for the hotel and the island, they sold the hotel to the Ardfin estate, but will stay living on the island. Let's hope the hotel continues to prosper. All in all, rather different to when Frances Murray visited in 1884: "The inn, or rather tavern was comfortless enough — the damp parlour full of smoke from a chronic blow-down in the chimney, the house resounding with drinking songs, fiddling, and laughing. The host and hostess were kind, but lacked the means to make us comfortable."¹⁹

The walk north through the village is pleasant. The church seems to have a semi-permanent collection of old photographs of Jura people. One of an early local GP with a cigarette in his hand! And there is an audio, Jura 'sound-scape'. The building was started in the late 18th century and there have been several waves of alterations since then. It is plain, calm and Scottish. There is a very useful playground just next to it. And nearby an outdoor table tennis table.

A bit further north, and up the hill a bit, there is an old village called Keils with the remains of crofting houses, some rescued by — I guess — incomers. Further up still is Cill Earnadil²⁰, an atmospheric graveyard. Here there is a serene view across the Sound of Jura to Kintyre. The birdsong and the sound of the rushing burn must drown out the minister's words. A good last resting place if only one was around to enjoy it. Unfortunately there is a ghastly concrete extension with horrible railings, particularly vile juxtaposed against the beautiful old rubble walls.

Look out for the plaque to Gillouir MacCrain who is said to have "lived to have kept 180 Christmasses in his own house", buried about 1645. This unlikely lifespan may be something

¹⁶ <https://www.jurawhisky.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/people/The-Antlers/100064866616249/>

¹⁸ <https://www.jurahotel.co.uk/>

¹⁹ Summer in the Hebrides, Sketches in Colonsay and Oronsay. James Maclehose & Sons, Glasgow, 1887. Page 78.

²⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38222/jura-keils-cill-earnadil>

to do with him being a Roman Catholic at a time when protestant Presbyterians were in the ascendant. Papish Christmas day in Scotland was banned but could be surreptitiously celebrated in peoples 'own houses' (only to be restored as a Scottish public holiday in 1958), and there were two calendars in use — the Gregorian and the Julian. So there were two December 25ths separated by a few days, two 'Christmasses' that could be 'kept' every year, as long as they were in your own house.

You can hire bikes from Jura Cycles (07562 762382) , or walk to, or take the bus to Jura House and its lovely gardens, as good as Achamore on Gigha. But don't. The gardens have been closed since the Ardfin estate was bought by an Australian hedge fund manager in 2010. He renovated and extended the house (no expense spared) and built for himself a world-class 18-hole golf course, along with hyper-luxury accommodation for paying guests (£20,000 a night for the full facilities apparently). Maybe he is expecting Donald Trump to call, certainly not little people like me. Perhaps one day this place will become a mouldering monument to the ludicrous wealth and social divisions of the early 21st century, like Kinloch Castle on Rum is a monument to the excesses of Edwardian society.

Kinuachdrachd Harbour

Kinuachdrachd harbour is a lush bay on the northeast tip of Jura, a lovely quiet spot. There is a small restored pier in the southern corner, for reasons I know not. The main and rather essential thing to do is walk 30-minutes south to Barnhill²¹. This is where the recently widowed George Orwell lived with his sister and young adopted son when he was writing *Nineteen Eighty Four*, already suffering from the TB which was to kill him in 1950. The book was actually finished in 1948 and so it is said by some that Orwell set it in 1984 by changing around the last two digits of the year. He surely can't have had the idea of such a dystopian book here, about as far away as one can get from what is normally but incorrectly referred to as 'civilisation' in the UK, and still have a roof over your head — it is the last but one house on the island, surrounded by fields and deciduous woods. Mind you, Barnhill is a fairly substantial house, but by all accounts it was not at all comfortable. However, it was very much where Orwell wanted to be, and where meeting local people he apparently shook off his longstanding prejudice against the 'Scotch.'²² There is still no tarmac road so far north, just a cart track suitable for Land Rovers and the like.

Lagg Bay

Not a lot here. The early 19th century house at the head of the bay may look like a pub, indeed it was once a pub — but no longer. The slipway and curving pier²³ are both marvellous early 19th century works, function and artistic structure satisfactorily combined, along with the third criterion for good architecture — delight. Built for the drovers to take cattle from Jura, Islay and Colonsay to the mainland. This trade died out not so long ago, the last Argyll drover died in 1957. The pier was also once used by the mail ferry to the mainland. And, in a major gale, to get the recent owner of the Jura Hotel to the mainland to be with his labouring wife in Edinburgh.

²¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnhill>, Jura

²² *Orwell's Island* by Les Wilson, Saraband, Glasgow, 2023

²³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38260/jura-lagg-harbour-jetty>

Loch Tarbert

A wild place indeed! This loch stretches for miles across the most uninhabited part of Jura, almost cutting the island in two. Apart from a shooting lodge at Glenbattrick on the south shore, and a few bothies, there is no obvious habitation (apparently the lodge is a summer retreat for Viscount Astor who owns the estate). Just moorland and a large number of raised beaches, so characteristic of Jura west coast geology. On a bad day it is dire, but on a good day it is fabulous as a getting away from it all place.

In days past it was a bit of a no-no for boaties. In the 17th century Martin Martin wrote *"it is not a harbour for vessels, or lesser boats, for it is altogether rocky"*²⁴. Even in 1938 John McIntock considered *"Loch Tarbert ... affords but little shelter, for its upper reaches are so rock-set as to be unnavigable, and lower down it is exposed to the west and tormented by fierce squalls from the hills"*²⁵. Nn poor visibility it is all but impossible to make out the leading lines (placed by the legendary Blondie Hasler after the second world war). But now with a chartplotter it is much easier to find your way around, and even easier with Antares charts.

There is, I understand, a lunch stop on the Antares Charts at An Sàilean, a small bay just at the northern entrance to the loch. I mention this because there are caves a few minutes to the northwest at Ruantallain where dead bodies were once kept until the weather was clement enough to ferry them across to Oronsay for burial (corpachs).

If there is another boat in the first anchorage, Cumhann Mòr Bay, you can go on through the first narrows to find any number of good anchoring spots, and further again through the second narrows although I never have. If you get to the head of the loch without hitting anything, you will have done very well. Cowper seems to have managed it in the 19th century without an engine, although he is not absolutely specific on this point²⁶. Maybe he was boasting

²⁴ A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland circa 1695. Martin Martin, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1994. The first good account of the Hebrides, and other islands. Written by a local ('a gentleman of Skye') in his 30s, who clearly travelled round all the places he wrote about, describing everything from the people, their religion, what they ate, farming, anchorages and lots more.

²⁵ West Coast Cruising. John McIntock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938. A between the wars account of not so much cruises in chronological order, but of the author's experiences on the west coast. However, there is too much history, fairy tales and misty Celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nonetheless, it gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing of what sort of boat he sailed, or with whom, and nor did he tell us anything about the people he met along the way. Or himself.

²⁶ Frank Cowper, Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea. Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today.

The loch is an attractive place spoilt only, said a friend, by 'the noise of a motor boat towing a small rowing boat containing the remains of two stags!' I don't think there is much to see or do ashore that you can't see from the boat, although there are beaches to sun yourself on — on a good day.

Lowlandman's Bay

Cowper reckoned this "*makes a capital resting place*"²⁷ and so it does except I find it a bit bleak, and not that easy to get ashore because it is all very shallow at the edges and you have to anchor a fair way out. The houses (1861) on the northeast point of the bay were built for the lighthouse keepers who looked after the Skervuile light until it was automated.

The small bay in the southwest — Drum an Dunan — is much more cosy and protected with nice woods on the north shore. Loads of seals on the islands just to the south. There is a grey sand beach of sorts at the head of the bay and a bit further up a couple of challenging piles of stones — were these burial cairns or just a farmer heaping up stones from a cleared field years ago?

Port an Tiobairt

The most northern anchorage on the northeast coast of Jura, and the very last house too. It must take the owners well over an hour to drive down to Craighouse, in part over an unmetalled road. The most obvious thing to do here is to walk to the north tip of Jura and inspect the Gulf of Corryvreckan²⁸ before having a go at it by boat (on old charts it was quaintly referred to as the "cauldron of the speckled sea", the English translation from the Gaelic).

Murdoch Mackenzie's description in 1776 still stands today: "*Coryvrechan is a violent breaking sea, and whirlpool, formed between the islands of Jura and Scarba, which will wash over any ship's deck, and be apt to sink her, if the hatches are open*"²⁹. But, he also realised that if you get your timing right "*the sea in this Sound is as smooth as in other neighbouring parts*". Nonetheless, it has a much fiercer reputation than it really deserves, Cowper reckoned the Swellies in the Menai Strait were far more dangerous, although he didn't actually go through the gulf himself. Even earlier, Dr John MacCulloch made a good point in one of his 1824 letters to Sir Walter Scott: "*The hazards of the Coryvrechan, are of the same nature as those of the other narrow channels of the Western Islands, as well as of the Pentland Firth; and if greater, they may still be avoided, with similar precautions. But as this passage is seldom used by boats, and never by vessels, it has received, in addition to the exaggeration, the further ill character which attends all untried danger. Had it been as necessary a channel as the Kyle Rich*

²⁷ Cowper *ibid*

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Corryvreckan

²⁹ The very first 'Sailing Directions' must surely be those published by Murdoch Mackenzie in 1776. He was an Orcadian cartographer and hydrographer, and the first to produce recognisable charts of the seas around the British Isles while working for the Admiralty. You can find the book on line, and also many of the charts on line at the National Library of Scotland. Mind you, some of his measurements for distance would strike one as quaint. For example, the rock in Canna Harbour now incorporated into the pier he described as being "*about a pistol shot from the shore*".

or Hoy Mouth, we should have heard far less of its horrors. Like those of the Mahlstrom, they shrink before the boldness of a fair examination"³⁰.

Of course the best time to look at (and listen to) the Corryvreckan is in a storm, with the flood tide against a swell from the west, while the easiest time to sail through is when it is calm and slack water (keeping to the south side). Not surprisingly the Corryvreckan has featured in at least one book and one film, probably many more. It was here that Jules Verne set the final scene of his novel, 'The Green Ray', and here too was the great drama in the film 'I know where I am going'. And also here George Orwell nearly drowned — if he had, there would have been no 'Nineteen Eighty Four'.

On the walk you will see deer and rabbits. Around the anchorage there is loads of bird song and in the anchorage there are loads of seals. It seems quite safe notwithstanding the rather unnerving sound of the tide racing by less than 100 metres away. Not a place to drag an anchor, or let the children loose in the dinghy. And you can walk down to Barnhill, rather further than from the Kinuachdrachd anchorage.

Tarbert Bay

The beach is a disappointment but behind it you will find a couple of standing stones, a burial ground with a small rectangular ruin of maybe a chapel (Cill Chalium-chille)³¹, and when I was there once a load of stags mixed up with some sheep. The dreadful large wooden hutted building looking like an industrial chicken farm is in fact the estate shooting lodge! Hardly 'Monarch of the Glen' style I would say. There doesn't seem much point but you could easily walk from here to the head of Loch Tarbert in less than half-an-hour, maybe to inspect the anchorage before trying to get to it from the sea.

³⁰ Rather hard work because it is very long and somewhat portentous is: The Highlands and Islands of Scotland, containing descriptions of their scenery and antiquities Longman 1824 by the doctor and chemist, but mostly geologist, Dr John MacCulloch. It comes in four volumes that can be downloaded from <http://www.electricscotland.com/travel/highlands.htm>. He himself was not a sailor but he certainly got around in OPBs (other people's boats).

³¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38659/jura-tarbert-cill-chalium-chille>

Kintyre

Last updated January 10th 2024



Kintyre, known as Cantyre until at least the 1930s, is almost an island. It is the long droopy-down bit of Scotland that separates the Clyde from the west coast proper. In fact it is so droopy that legend has it that it was once the benchmark for how erect a penis could become before being banned on BBC television (i.e. hardly at all). The Mull of Kintyre, the pointy end bit, became very well known as the Paul McCartney and Denny Laine 1970s song. The west side of Kintyre, which is what we are concerned with here, is of course exposed to the south and west but there are some convenient lochs to escape into, as well as shelter by the lovely island of Gigha. And Northern Ireland is only 11 nautical miles away, across the strong tides of the North Channel.

Carsaig Bay

There are several anchorages around the islands off the bay, and a not very good one in the bay itself. None are within particularly easy reach of Carsaig. Not that there is a lot to see and do there. In fact it is rather suburban with a scattering of mostly modern houses, and a static caravan site. There really is nothing of great interest, apart from a reasonably atmospheric cemetery in the middle of which is a very uncared for and doorless enclosure to one of the Campbell families. The slightly crumbling jetty is apparently a Telford. If you are energetic enough, and feel the need for some milk or dinner out, you could walk the near mile to Tayvallich (see Loch Sween).

On the whole I think it is best just to explore around the islands in the dinghy. If you do go ashore there is lovely typically Argyll countryside to wander around, festooned with primroses and celandine in the spring, with the calls of cuckoos. For example, land at Aoran nam Buth, the bay to the southeast of Eilean Dubh, walk uphill to the east to find a surprisingly large ruined farmstead at Barnashaig, and above that Dùn Bhronaig overlooking a small lochan.

Eilean Mòr (MacCormick Islands with various alternative spellings)

This tiny and most Hebridean of islands¹ is now owned and looked after by the Eilean Mòr MacCormick Trust² (the island was bequeathed to the Scottish National party in 1978). The Trust has restored the jetty (nicely) and built a small stone house with over-large windows and a turfed roof (not so nicely). They have also provided useful information for visitors (many of whom come by RIBs from Loch Sween).

Half way up to the summit is the fairly well preserved ruin of St Cormaigh's Chapel, a 13th century structure with the later addition of the chancel vaulting in the 14th century, and even later a fireplace for some kind of domestic conversion³. Eventually it was said to have been used as an illicit still. Be all that as it may, it's a serene spot with the view of the Paps of Jura across the sound of Jura, and in the south just a glimpse of Ireland from where the early Christian monks came. A recumbent and decaying monument is tucked into the south wall of the chancel, perhaps listening to the seagull cries and sparrow chirpings as there is nothing much else than the birdsong to break the silence of this holy and ancient place. And in the early summer, if you stand and listen carefully, you may hear the characteristic squeaky sound of the corncrake, one of our rarest birds. The crumbling remains of a cross in the graveyard is said to be 10th century. The cross on the summit of the island is a replica of a 14th century cross now in the National Museum of Scotland, but it is striking nonetheless.

Just to the east of the chapel, about 50 metres, is a well which is presumably why this particular island was colonised in the first place. Now it's a useful place to get the salt out of your hair.

On the east-facing slope of the highest point you will find a rather dank cave which is difficult to get into, and even more difficult to get out of. Take a rope and torch! This is apparently where 8th century monks liked to meditate away from it all. The two rudely carved crosses on the wall are said to be from the same period. Perhaps even St Cormac himself meditated here, an Irish contemporary of St Columba, but this is a bit unlikely.

Eilean Tràigh, West Loch Tarbert

This is a pretty spot, quiet too although beware the wash from the Islay ferries. Well worth getting off the boat for a stroll by the oak woods a little way towards the head of the loch. There was clearly a ferry here once (hence Ferry House marked on the OS map) and there are still the remains of a jetty. A little further on, before getting to the road, look left to see the rather astonishing Ardpatrik House set amongst overgrown gardens, late 18th century with some unfortunate alterations and additions, including the rather incongruous 19th century porch. It doesn't look very inhabited but maybe someone is lurking in there somewhere. I guess this estate should be owned by someone with enough money to restore it to its original glory, so with loads of money. A rock star maybe, or a footballer, or even a banker. Some of the estate cottages have been up for sale, as well as building plots, so there is something going on.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eilean_M%C3%B2r,_MacCormaig_Isles

² <https://eileanmormaccormick.weebly.com/trust.html>

³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38634/eilean-mor-st-cormacs-chapel-and-burial-ground>

Head of West Loch Tarbert

Why would anyone want to sail all the way up to the head of this loch, just to tack (probably) back down it again? Well, it is very pretty to start off with. There are lots of deciduous woods hiding well-planted conifer plantations, and neat fields stretching down to the water's edge. At the head of the loch, right up at the end, there is a rather charming if somewhat beaten-up pier with some rusting hulks (four in a watery graveyard at my last count), lots of wild flowers, and usually no other visiting yacht to disturb the peace.

This is the tradesman's entrance to the village of Tarbert⁴, half-an-hour walk up quite a busy road. As early as the 18th century there was a plan to dig a canal here across the narrow isthmus to connect the west coast with the Clyde, so avoiding the perils of the Mull of Cantyre as it was then called. But there was never enough money, and eventually the connection was made a few miles further north at Crinan (although longer, a much better bet than having to get out of West Loch Tarbert in a southwesterly gale). If you are that keen, drag your boat across to the village like the Vikings did, hence the Gaelic name of 'Tairbeart' meaning isthmus or portage point.

There are plenty of Clyde yachts around in Tarbert marina, quite an eclectic bunch actually with some nice classics, but the village is not wildly interesting. The outdoor gym by the marina is a good place to get rid of children for an hour or two. The marina itself is excellent with superb toilets and friendly staff. The harbour wall is a 'Telford', so a touch of quality to make up for some truly awful late 20th century architecture. Wander up to inspect, but not enter, the remains of the ruined, mostly late 15th century castle⁵. The castle itself looks much better from afar than close to because part of the stabilisation is with inappropriate brick, and there is a very shouty modern carved stone panel fixed to the southeast outer wall. However, the view down to the harbour is delightful.

Tarbert has a butcher, a very good ironmonger, a small chandlery in the marina, a book shop/crafty sort of place (the Loch Fyne Gallery), and a Co-op supermarket. Next to where the Portavadie ferry comes in, you will find Prentice Seafoods with a wonderful selection of shellfish, so well worth checking out. Apropos Portavadie, you could take the ferry across to the modern marina ⁶ built in the huge hole originally dug in the 1970s for an oilrig construction yard, but never used. There to enjoy some of their astonishing facilities — an excellent restaurant with friendly staff, a leisure centre and spa boasting among other things an infinity pool in which to wallow while the rain pours down on your bare head. And even a hair-straightener in the men's toilet. Once you could wander up the road to the abandoned, concrete and graffiti-strewn village of Polphail built to house the 500 oilrig workers who were never employed and never arrived. Most atmospheric but now flattened to make way for a distillery planned for the site.

The best place to get a good meal in Tarbert is at Starfish⁷, excellent seafood and very cheerful and friendly (you can tell the last from their website) but possibly now closed (ph 01880 820733). But then I have not tried the Galley Café in Harbour Street which sounds good (ph

⁴ <http://www.tarbertlochfyne.com/index.php>

⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39316/tarbert-tarbert-castle>

⁶ <https://www.portavadie.com/>

⁷ <https://www.starfishtarbert.com/>

01880 820090). The pubs do not seriously beckon, and there is no real ale to be had anywhere (tried that, no demand, I was told). The Café Ca'Dora does the usual business.

As well as the well-established Scottish Series⁸ for people who like to race (and shout loudly at each other), the Tarbert Traditional Boat Festival⁹ has been relaunched for those of a more contemplative nature (but it may have gone into hibernation again).

So not really an anchorage to dally in, but useful for crew changes as there is a bus from Tarbert to Glasgow. And the anchorage is a nice sheltered place to hang out.

Loch na Cille (Loch Keills)

Take the chance with a northerly wind to anchor below the 12th century chapel which has been beautifully restored, albeit as a quite dull box-like structure (which presumably it originally was)¹⁰. The roof is new, and inside there is a marvellous collection of medieval graveslabs now protected from the erosive Kintyre elements. They are very well described as well. The 8th century High Cross of Keills has also been moved in here — carved from Loch Sween stone, Iona school. Amazingly, the chapel is unlocked and long may it remain so.

It is well worth walking to the tip of Rubha na Cille, a narrow headland with fantastic views across to Jura with a distant glimpse of Ireland as well. Also the terrain is unusual because of the spiky rocks which are great for a touch of what I am told is now called bouldering (but it is a long way to bring your mat).

Loch Stornoway

I reckon it must be a bit of a struggle landing the dinghy on this wide-open sandy bay so I haven't tried yet. However, there are a few things to see — a fairly standard Church of Scotland Parish Church, and a fairly standard burial ground on the east bank of the burn which provides a rather delightful musical backdrop for the gravestones.

Kilberry church¹¹ was built in 1821, it is nicely painted outside but was rather forlorn inside until it was repainted in 2012. Before redecoration there was an abandoned 1902 Gaelic Bible on a windowsill in the gallery, removed now but still lurking in the pulpit along with an 1862 Self-Interpreting Bible. The upper windows in the south front are 'blind' which adds architectural elegance but not interior light. One does wonder for how long these charming buildings will be used as the local permanent population becomes more secular, drifting away to be replaced with holiday homeowners, and indeed how long it will be before the churches fall down or are converted into private homes (as many have been already). The divisions in the church about such matters as gay ministers and gay marriage can't be helping. However, this particular church still seems to thrive with services on two Sundays a month.

⁸ <https://www.scottishseries.co.uk/>

⁹ <http://www.tarbertfestivals.co.uk/festival-traditional-boat.php>

¹⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38654/keills-chapel-and-graveyard>

¹¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38998/carse-kilberry-parish-church>

There are three standing stones in a field just before the road — mysterious, lined up north-south. I imagine they at least will outlast the church, they have certainly been standing for very much longer.

I think you would have to be a very zealous foodie to make the four-mile trek to the Kilberry Inn¹², but by all accounts it would be worth the effort. I suppose if you phoned they might come and get you, and more importantly take you back later leaving you with the problem of getting into the dinghy in a swell and back to the boat (ph 01880 770223).

Rathlin Island

Yes I know, I know, Rathlin¹³ is part of Ireland not Scotland but it's near enough, and such a lovely place should not be missed out, so convenient for stopping off when rounding the Mull of Kintyre. In the not so far off days you just tied up in the inner harbour next to the lovely Georgian manor house, but now there are pontoons where you are surrounded by eider ducks, with seals very nearby (you will need the Irish Cruising Club Sailing Directions, the Clyde Cruising Club Directions only cover Scotland).

Rathlin is definitely a place to have a walk, and not just around the harbour but to one or more of the three lighthouses (three on such a small island must say something about the tides round here). The main seabird-nesting cliff is at the west end of the island, the kingdom of the RSPB¹⁴, about four miles.

Around 140 people live on the island. The houses are almost all fairly recent but here and there you will find some old cottages. The manor house belongs to the National Trust, but maybe no longer, has been refurbished, and is run as a guesthouse¹⁵, with a restaurant too but not every evening (ph 028 207 60046). Beside it is a restored barn and above that the remains of a walled garden. Along the road a bit there is a handy play park; an outdoor gym; an unpromising-looking pub/café — McCuaig's Bar¹⁶ — but actually it does good pub grub, Guinness too, and is friendly (0208 20760011); a small visitor centre and museum in the old boathouse; and a gift sort of a shop. The community¹⁷ runs a small provisions shop, or maybe it is a Co-op, in the manor house itself but this must suffer from the ease with which the local population can take the fast ferry over to Ballycastle with its much bigger shops.

Along the foreshore is St Thomas'¹⁸, a pretty church built in the early 19th century, light and airy, along with its graveyard with a view. The Roman Catholic church up the lane above it is quite plain, but has some attractive stations of the cross.

Rathlin was where the first commercial wireless telegraph link was established in 1898, by Marconi, to Ballycastle. And those old enough, will remember that Rathlin suddenly became world famous in 1987 when Richard Branson, one of the only businessmen you have ever heard of, crash-landed his hot air balloon after his record breaking crossing of the Atlantic.

¹² <https://www.kilberryinn.com/>

¹³ <http://www.rathlincommunity.org/>

¹⁴ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/rathlin-island>

¹⁵ <http://www.manorhouserathlin.com/>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Mc-Cuaigs-Bar-1562092597376209/>

¹⁷ <http://rathlincommunity.org/>

¹⁸ <http://www.ballintoy.connor.anglican.org/rathlin%20church.html>

Finally, why the cardinal buoy in Church Bay? It marks the wreck of HMS Drake¹⁹, a first world war armoured cruiser. She was coming back from Atlantic convoy duty when she was torpedoed off the North Irish coast by a German U-boat that got lucky. She managed to limp into the bay, hitting a merchant ship on the way, and then get off all her surviving crew before turning over and sinking — only 18 crew died.

Sailean Mòr

Not a place to be when there is any wind north of west, but pleasant enough otherwise on passage through the Sound of Jura. There is a Land Rover track just above the shore which connects Tayvallich with Crinan. It does not make a particularly inspiring walk, largely because the views are mostly obstructed by trees, at least within half-a-mile or so either way from the anchorage. No longer can you go ashore, like Capt. Harvey in the 1930s, to *"the crofters to get fresh milk and eggs"*²⁰. There is a wooden walkway leading through the trees to cup and ring markings, to the north, maybe in a mile or so

Sanda Island

What changes there have been here. The pub was once the thing to see and do on Sanda Island²¹, as well as the obvious walks and views. Where once there had been a community of maybe a hundred people, by 2010 there were just three — Charles and Wendy McVey and their toddler. They had came back to run the pub (and the restaurant, the holiday lets, the fire service, the post, and 300 sheep) for the new owners of the island, Michi Meier and Berna Civeleker. Charles and Wendy must have known what they were doing having done the same job for Dick Gannon, albeit at a time when they didn't have to think about how to get their child to nursery across the Sound of Sanda. Previously the island had been owned by this Mr Gannon, an irascible Englishman by all accounts, but who commendably was responsible for restoring the old buildings by the pier (very nicely) and building the pub itself, although you wouldn't have thought it was 'new' to look at.

This pub must have outclassed the Old Forge on Knoydart as the most remote pub in the UK, there is not even a scheduled ferry service. The pub's name was interesting — the Byron Darnton Tavern. This was the name of the Liberty ship which foundered off the island in 1946 while taking American servicemen and their families back to the US after the war. The ship's name was derived from a renowned American war correspondent who had been accidentally killed by a bomb dropped by an American plane. The pub sort of reopened in 2011 as the Sanda Island Hotel and Restaurant, a supposedly up-market establishment, with four moorings. However, the website in 2013 made no mention of any hotel, ominously just that Sanda was "A tranquil private island". And guess what, in 2014 the new owners tried to close it all off to the public which was perhaps in their minds when they bought the island. But do not be put off, you have a legal right to roam in Scotland as long as you don't get too near the owner's residence. This means not using the pier which "is in front of the living room of the house" according to the owner and now adorned with a Strictly Private sign. So what, pull the

¹⁹ <https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/hms-drake-rathlin-island>

²⁰ Sailing Orders. Practical instruction to yachtsman, illustrated by the author's cruises on the West Coast of Scotland. Capt J R Harvey, Alexander Maclehose, London 1935.

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanda_Island

dinghy up on the beach and go for a walk. Apparently the island's water supply has now been condemned by the local water authority, so what that means for anyone who plans to live here I know not.

By 2015 the whole place looked dead. There was no one to be seen anywhere on the island, the pub buildings were all closed up and deteriorating. Notwithstanding news reports that the island could be rented for £2000 a day!

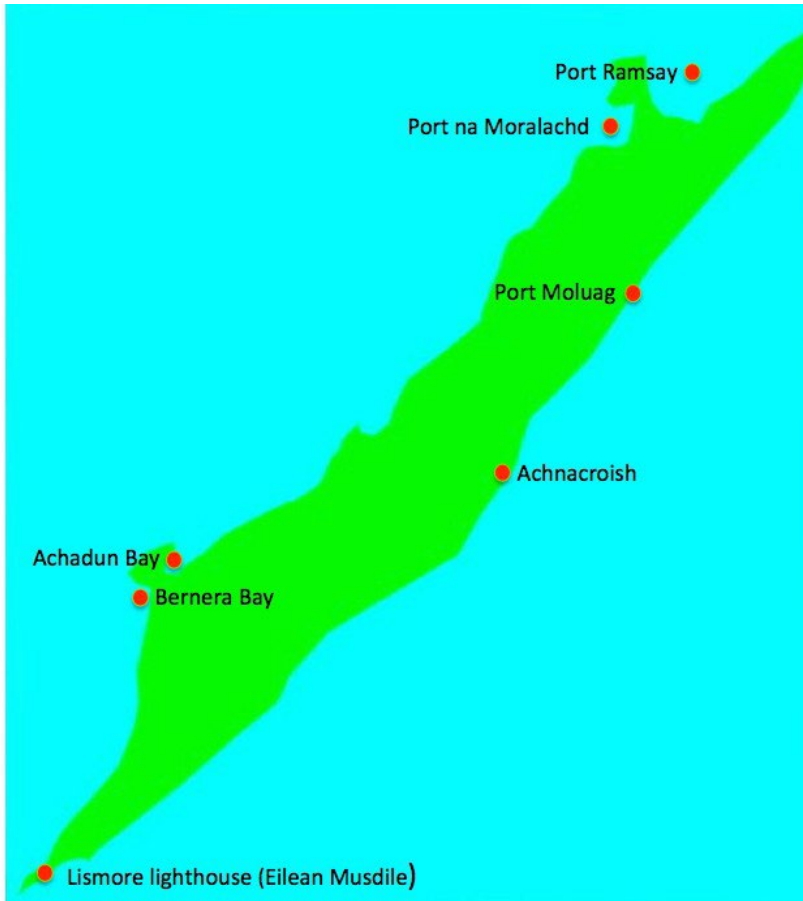
Along by the boathouse (conspic. and crucial for entry without a chartplotter) you will find St Ninian's late medieval chapel (remains of) along with a very weathered slab and cross²². This is where Charles and Wendy got married, certainly an original venue. The boathouse was once the base for the Sanda Island Bird Observatory, defunct since 2013, and by 2015 the building itself was reduced to a wreck, thanks to the uncaring island owners presumably. Incredible that we let foreigners buy beautiful Scottish islands and then leave them to rot.

It is definitely worth the 20-30 minute walk across to the lighthouse, Stevenson again, 1850. It is set on a most spectacular outcrop right next to a natural arch, with the tide swirling all around, and a bit of the Byron Darnton still visible at low water. The lighthouse cottages look derelict. Sad.

²² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38698/sanda-island-st-ninians-chapel>

Lismore

Last updated January 25th 2024



Lismore, derived from the Gaelic Lios Mòr meaning 'the great garden', ¹ is an island where there has been no pub since 1881, and even now there is no hotel or restaurant. Instead, there is peace and quiet, farming on remarkably fertile soil (based on limestone), lots of wild flowers, and not too many holiday homes. Most people on Lismore live there, about 170 of them (in the 19th century there were about 1500, too many for the island to support).

Apparently St Columba thought Lismore was far too fertile and comfortable for a monastic settlement (although in 562AD he was beaten to it by his brother monk St Moluag). So he went off to Morvern to found the church at Kiel, a much tougher

environment and so more suitable for serious monkish activities.

A good half-day circular walk, starting at any of the northern anchorages, takes you to most of the interesting things to see: the church at Clachan, Castle Coeffin, Tirefour Broch, limekilns at Port Ramsay, and the Heritage Centre (with the only café on the island). For example, from Achnacroish walk along the coast to the Tirefour Broch at Port Moluag, then along very small roads to Port Ramsay, round the bay and over the hill past Port na Moralachd to Castle Coeffin, to the centre of the island again and the church at Clachan, tea and buns at the café, then back along the road to Achnacroish. One time we came across a shepherd not on foot, or on a quad bike, but on an electric bike which clearly kept him pretty fit.

Lismore does not seem to be much visited by boaties, or by others, even though it is very close to Oban by ferry and just a stone's throw from Appin, also by ferry but not for cars. Once there you can hire bikes, phone 07376 425996². So it is all quiet and peaceful. But there is one blot on the landscape, the granite quarry at Glensanda over on Morvern, the only coastal quarry in the UK. You can see it from almost everywhere on the west coast of the island.

¹ <https://isleoflismore.com/>

² <https://www.facebook.com/lismorebikehire>

If you want to know more then read Robert Hay's 'Lismore, the Great Garden', Birlinn, 2009. And for archaeology, history and landscape take a look at an informative short film.³

Achnacroish

Achnacroish is just a wee hamlet, there is nothing really to see or do, just the primary school, some not very attractive houses and a rather beaten-up pier and ferry terminal. It is all surprisingly Hebridean even though it is so close to Oban.

Take a walk to the Heritage Centre⁴ which is in a calm and quite attractive 2007 modern building (ph 01631 760030) on the 'main' road opposite the turning for Balnagown. It is only about a mile from the anchorage if you take the path along the coast via Balnagown. There are a lot of interesting old photographs and artefacts, and a restored cottage with an audio of someone speaking in Gaelic — post blackhouse because it has a fireplace and is divided into two rooms,. In the same building as the museum is the Isle of Lismore café⁵, the only place on the island for a cup of tea. It sells home-baked cakes, and snacks of various sorts — it does not do regular evening meals, and nor does anywhere else on the island (ph 07745 536902). Check the opening times on their website before making a journey. Sitting outside on the deck on a nice day is extremely pleasant, particularly watching the sweaty cyclists toiling along the road below.

A little further along the road you come to Clachan with a delightful and extraordinarily interesting church⁶. At first glance it looks like an ordinary Scottish Kirk but look closer and you will see all sorts of stuff which reveals its more illustrious past, incredibly for such a small place, as a cathedral which began life in the 13th and 14th centuries as the seat of the Bishop of Argyll. By 1512 it was in ruins. The present structure arose in the 18th century. It is based on the original cathedral choir, although it has been much altered since then (the gallery and the timber roof are late Victorian). Confusingly, the inside is now back to front with the pulpit at the west end. The stained glass windows are good. The few remains of the older cathedral are as spectacular as they are surprising — seven external buttresses, the blocked-off doors in the north and south walls, the arch in the west wall, the three-arched sedilia and the piscina in the south wall. The graveyard is charming, full of wild flowers, a good place to sit and think, some old graveslabs have been stacked up under cover. The immediately adjacent old manse is a lovely 18th and 19th century building, as is the 18th century Bachuil House 100 yards further towards Port Ramsay. Like so many Scottish churches in 2024, this one is for sale and hopefully the community will be able to buy it. It would be a travesty to convert such a historic building into a home for some incomer.

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tVo-msJbNZx2qNOBf7MY12LY_jQRgGrW/view

⁴ <https://www.lismoregaelicheritagecentre.org/>

⁵ <https://www.lismoregaelicheritagecentre.org/the-cafe/>

⁶ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23100/lismore-st-moluags-cathedral>

Bernera and Achadun bays

Achadun (Achinduin) castle⁷ is not as ruined as Ardtornish castle, not as restored as Gylen, and certainly not as complete as Dunstaffnage — but it is in a pleasing position above the bays giving two anchorages protected from all wind directions, no doubt a consideration to those who put the castle there in the first place. But these early builders would not have had their view up Loch Linnhe ruined by the Glensanda quarry⁸. However, one must not moan. That quarry does employ something like 200 people, the stone goes out by boat rather than by road, and it will I think eventually be all grassed over.

The castle dates from the 13th century and was apparently built by the bishops of Argyll in the days when bishops needed to defend themselves, from what I know not. But nowadays it is thought the MacDougalls built it and only later did the Bishops take it over. It was probably abandoned in about 1400.

Walk down to the tidal isthmus across to Bernera island and have a look at what I think must have been a fish trap — easily visible at low tide, facing northwest. On the southeast side of the island is a very, very ruined chapel⁹ with no visible gravestones, and loads of wild flowers in summer

Lismore lighthouse (on Eilean Musdile)

Not an official anchorage but that doesn't mean one can't anchor in quiet weather off either the east or west slipway depending on the wind direction, at least for a short while to have an explore (but watch the very fast tidal flow, particularly on the east side). And well worthwhile it is to stand on the terrace looking out over the swirling tide and the boats going to and from the Sound of Mull. As ever the lighthouse¹⁰, the two cottages and associated buildings and slipways, are all beautifully proportioned and constructed, particularly the curving wall bounding the path through the garden where once the lighthouse keepers grew their vegetables. Of course it is yet another Stevenson, built in 1833 and automated in 1965. There is an interesting film on the web about how the lighthouse used to be supplied when it was still manned¹¹.

What the two very large walled fields were for I don't know, surely too large for a vegetable garden but OK for a cow or two (there are some ruined byres to support this idea). The arched bridge connecting one island with the other has no obvious purpose now, but it was built to transport materials to build the lighthouse from the original landing opposite Lismore itself.

The cottages, and indeed all of Eilean Musdile, are now privately owned but I have never seen anyone around during my many, many trips past the lighthouse. But one sunny spring day I did stumble on the owners busily painting their cottages white, and very friendly they were too. They don't mind anyone wandering around their island paradise, just be careful not to disturb them if they are in residence (a visible boat or helicopter is no clue because they are

⁷ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23018/lismore-achadun-castle>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glensanda>

⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22656/bernera-island-chapel-and-burial-ground>

¹⁰ <https://www.nlb.org.uk/lighthouses/lismore/>

¹¹ <https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/5206/83443441>

brought here by boat taxi from Oban). By the way, off here is where I want my ashes scattered when the time comes.

Port Moluag

Hardly a port, a mere indentation in the coastline just north of a line of low cliffs, with a stony beach to land on. Walk up the hill a bit, then left to Tirefour (Tirfuir) Broch¹². Built in the first century AD, it is perched on the cliffs overlooking the Lynn of Lorne, surely a defensive position. It is not as well preserved, or as high, as the broch at Vaul on Tiree, but it is a broch nonetheless. So you can get some idea of what these strange Iron Age structures¹³ looked like. You can't get between the typical double walls, there is a fence barring the way. But it is a fine airy spot from which to contemplate

Port na Moralachd

Notwithstanding the fish cages this is a great anchorage, and you can't even see Glensanda if you get yourself in the right place, tucked into the north or in the more traditional south bay (there is a very ruined lime kiln down on the shore of the latter, the ones at Port Ramsay are much better preserved, see below). There is quite a bit of driftwood to make a barbeque.

From here you can easily walk over to Port Ramsay. Better, although it is about a half-an-hour walk, is an expedition to Castle Coeffin¹⁴ and maybe on to the church at Clachan¹⁵ and the Heritage Centre¹⁶. Not only is the walk very pleasant but the small castle has a great position perched on a limestone outcrop with splendid views up and down the Lynn of Morvern (avert your eyes from Glensanda and take photographs when it is in the shade). The castle is very ruined but it has been stabilised and you can scramble up to take in the views. If you look down on the bay to the southwest you can see very clearly the remains of a fish trap. It is another MacDougall castle, originally built in the 13th century, but before that it was the site of a Norse fortress.

The small farm with loads of horses, tucked away behind the castle and more or less invisible from the sea, is a bit of a surprise, and the signs to direct you around it are helpful rather than antagonistic. More recent ones are perhaps a little grumpy.

¹² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23082/lismore-tirefour-castle>

¹³ <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofScotland/Brochs-the-Tallest-Prehistoric-Buildings-in-Britain/>

¹⁴ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23093/lismore-castle-coeffin>

¹⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23100/lismore-st-moluags-cathedral>

¹⁶ <https://www.lismoregaelicheritagecentre.org/>

Port Ramsay

Despite the slightly daunting entrance between covered rocks, once you are in there is loads of space to anchor, and in more or less any wind direction. As it has been for over two centuries: *"Ramsey Bay, near the E. end of Lismore, is the only safe anchorage in this Island; the ground is good, the harbour pretty well sheltered, and the depth sufficient for any ship".*¹⁷ To safely enter the small bay to the east you need the Antares chart.

Port Ramsay itself is a charming place with many wild flowers and a very extensive foreshore full of whelks, hermit crabs and various other forms of life, fringed with sea pinks. Good for brambles (blackberries) too. And seals on the rocks at the entrance. The only problem is that it is quite a long row to the shore from the larger anchorage to the west — aim for the island in front of the cottages, but watch out you don't get cut off by the tide on your way back.

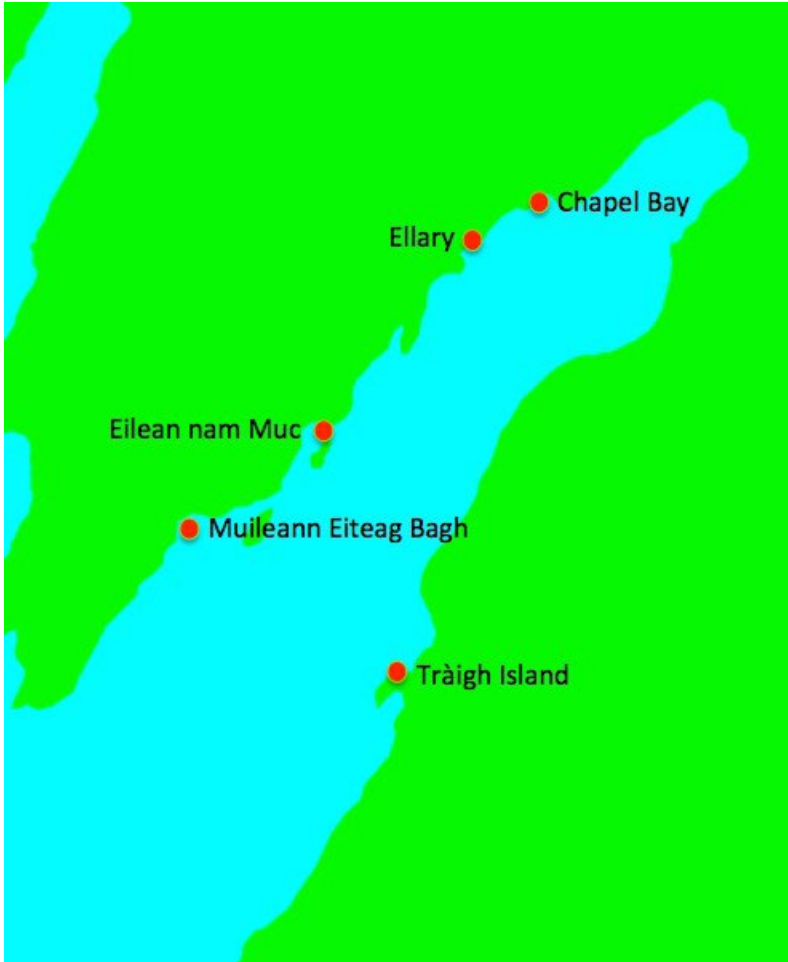
The main thing to see is the early 19th century lime kilns¹⁸ just northeast of the workers' cottages built in about 1850, surprisingly not mostly holiday homes — yet. Lime production for agriculture and building became a major Victorian industry on Lismore, but by 1934 the last kiln (in Sailean down the coast) had closed. Just behind the kilns is the quarry where you can still see where the holes for the explosive charges were drilled into the cliff face. The slipway on the foreshore is where boats once arrived with coal for the kilns, and left for Glasgow with the lime. More or less the whole island is limestone so the number of lime kilns should be no surprise. In 2017, a rather in-your-face house was built right next to the kilns.

¹⁷ From the very first 'Sailing Directions', published by Murdoch Mackenzie in 1776. He was an Orcadian cartographer and hydrographer, and the first to produce recognisable charts of the seas around the British Isles while working for the Admiralty. You can find the book on line, and also many of the charts at the National Library of Scotland. Mind you, some of his metrics for distance strike one as quaint. For example, the rock in Canna Harbour now incorporated into the pier he described as being *"about a pistol shot from the shore"*.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lime_kiln

Loch Caolisport

Last updated January 11th 2024



An attractive loch in a low key sort of a way, very open to the southwest for sure so hopeless for anchoring if there is any significant swell. However, there are at least five anchorages in suitable weather, and a couple more on the northwest side if you carefully examine the Antares charts.

Chapel Bay

The name is apt. From the anchorage you can just about see the ruined 13th century St Columba's chapel¹ submerged in the bracken just across the small road running along the shoreline. Apart from the slab at the east end (I presume covering a grave) the interior is so overgrown that you can't see anything else. Just behind the chapel are a couple of caves, the largest with an altar of some sort, and a cross which is

carved on the wall above it². Maybe St Columba himself hid in this cave, who knows. Further to the left is a rather charming, mossy and secretive waterfall tumbling through the trees — it has a charming sound too. If you walk along the road heading south, in a short while you get to Ellary House, or you can up anchor and move to Ellary itself.

Ellary

Even though the Sailing Directions are a near blank for Loch Caolisport, there must be several places to anchor near here, at least when the wind is from the north. There are hardly any other boats around, even though the scenery is lovely. If you are in to really mouldering burial grounds, then try and find Cladh a'Bhile³ southwest of Ellary House by about 600 metres. It took me two attempts, and you certainly need an OS map. The key is a couple of broken down metal gates, at the northwest side of a clearing in the woods. You will find some 7th and 8th century cross-marked stones, a terrific grave slab almost buried in the undergrowth displaying a splendid sword, and a surprisingly recent gravestone from 1999 (Grid ref. 7333

¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39011/cove-st-columbas-chapel>

² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39012/st-columbas-cave-ellary>

³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39051/ellary-cladh-a-bhile>

7560). Should these ancient stones stay here, mysterious, unmarked with no signage, more and more hidden as nature takes over without any obvious human hand to keep things tidy? Or should they be moved to a museum, or somewhere like Keills Chapel by Loch na Cille where they could be properly displayed? I am not sure.

Ellary House is the large Victorian pile by the shore, designed by David Bryce and built in 1870, and then rebuilt by Robert Lorimer after a fire in 1894-8. It is not open to the public and I have no idea who lives there, if anyone very much.

Tràigh Island

Be careful, there are two Eilean Tràighs in this one loch alone, and others elsewhere. Not too surprising as in translation from the Gaelic it means island of the shore, or beach. I have not been to this one but it is said to be a very attractive anchorage, just north of the almost island on the southeast shore of the loch.

Muileann Eiteag Bagh

A very pleasant and rather remote spot with a bit of a beach (sand and pebbles) which is good for a barbeque, a small crag well-known to climbers, and if you walk up beside the burn for 20 minutes you will find a small and ruined township that was gradually abandoned in the late 19th and early 20th century — Stronefield⁴.

Eilean nam Muc

There is a small beach but it is sadly covered in plastic trash. If you can avert your eyes and walk northeast and up through lovely deciduous woods you may find the single ruined and very isolated cottage at Ardnafrain. It looks to be later than a black house, possibly 19th century. Miles from anywhere, and with no obvious track to the sea or even to Ellary

⁴ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/154280/stronefield>

Loch Craignish

Last updated January 8th 2024



Loch Craignish is tremendously attractive in a low-key sort of a way — no mountains or beaches, just knobbly hills, islands and water. There must be many more than just the 'official' anchorages in the Clyde Cruising Club sailing directions to explore with walks ashore, all within easy walking distance of the pub, café, marina and shop at Ardfern — ideal for family cruising. As Cowper put it: *"The loch is worth exploring for all the strange nooks it possesses, and the very beautiful scenery"*¹. If the scenery looks a bit familiar to film buffs, then they are right, the boat chase in 'From Russia with Love' was filmed here (as a substitute for Turkey!)². For detail about

the area take a look at the Craignish website³.

¹ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today. His obituarist in *Yachting Monthly* wrote in 1930: *"From his earliest days Mr. Cowper took cruising to heart and probably did more to popularize this particular way of life than any man of his day. It is almost inconceivable to us now the prejudice which then existed in the public mind against the man who did not employ hands aboard his yacht. But it was through this veteran singlehanded sailor's adventures and writings that the public began to recognize small yacht cruising as a sane man's pastime"*.

² <http://www.scotlandthemovie.com/movies/russiac1.html>

³ <https://www.craignish.info/>

Ardfern

Ardfern⁴ has been our boat's winter home for many years so I cannot escape a personal bias for such a nice place. The marina⁵ is sheltered (ph 01852 500247), the chandlery is the best in the area, the staff are exceptionally friendly and will fix all the broken bits of boat, it is a good place to leave a boat for a bit, and the countryside around is Argyll at its knobbly best. Of course if you are on passage it is quite a way up Loch Craignish, and not a place to escape from people in the height of summer. But there are compensations as well as the marina facilities — the pub, Lucy's café, the shop, and the walks.

Out of the marina to the left you get to an extremely well-stocked shop in a couple of minutes. You can pre-order your provisions if you give them a bit of warning (ph 01852 500298). A bit further on you will find a surprisingly elaborate contemporary bus stop shelter. Seems a bit over the top to me. In another few minutes you get to the Galley of Lorne,⁶ a hotel and pub which has a cosy bar with open fires, and meals (by no means cheap). You can choose from the same menu in the rather large and wide-open restaurant (the view is good if you get a table by the window). A big plus is that they pride themselves in always having several real ales, and they really do, as well as the stuff that froths and bubbles out of taps (ph 01852 500284). Lucy's café⁷, opposite the pub, opened in the middle of the 2020 pandemic, seems remarkably busy which I guess given the quality of their stuff should not be surprising. Wholesome food, delicious cakes, closed in the evenings (ph 01852 500781).

Just past the Galley and Lucy's you will find the early 19th century parish church⁸, a bit dilapidated on the outside with a couple of curious painted walls to give the impression of windows, the inside is plain and serene. The painted woodwork gives a charming sense of airiness. But sadly it is now locked, and like so many Church of Scotland churches it's for sale.

If you turn right out of the marina you get to the village hall⁹ in about 10 minutes, opened in 2005 after years of fund-raising. It hosts many activities so check their website to see what is on when you are around. More and more houses seem to be sprouting in and around the village, many with solar panels which is a good thing.

A nice easy walk is to turn right just after the primary school and keep going up the hill and on until eventually you go down a hill and arrive at Craobh Haven (see Loch Melfort and Shuna). Then walk back again. There are rather longer but very pleasant walks around the Craignish peninsular taking in the anchorage at Bàgh Bàn (see Firth of Lorne), the cup and

⁴ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/ardfern/ardfern/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.ardfernyacht.co.uk/index.asp>

⁶ <https://www.galleyoflorne.co.uk/>

⁷ [https://lucys-](https://lucys-ardfern.co.uk/?fbclid=IwAR3miKX3rqRu2KFo1v9Xp3j15uzr5wuL1kdtmgG9jAYgHRyghSYr8rJ1E_w)

ardfern.co.uk/?fbclid=IwAR3miKX3rqRu2KFo1v9Xp3j15uzr5wuL1kdtmgG9jAYgHRyghSYr8rJ1E_w

⁸ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/ardfern/craignishparishchurch/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.craignish.org.uk/cvh/>

ring marked rocks above the bay, Craignish Castle (undistinguished conversion) and Dùn Mhuilig (see below).

Bàgh na Cille

Just a bay, useful in a westerly wind or for waiting for the tide at the Dorus Mòr, but nothing particular ashore despite the name suggesting there might be an old chapel somewhere.

Bàgh Dun Mhuilig

Not an official anchorage, but easy to anchor off the old shed in quiet conditions, but watch out for the seagrass restoration project in the shallow water, fortunately too shallow for anchoring¹⁰. Visible on the hill just up from the anchorage, you will see the ruins of the old parish church of Kilmarie (or is it Kilmore?)¹¹. Wander up and take a look both at the view up and down the loch, and at the early 13th century chapel. The chapel was abandoned in the late 17th century when the parishioners went off to worship in Ardfern on the site of the church that was later built in the 1730s. Some restoration work was done here in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and later still the 14th and 15th century graveslabs were moved into the chapel under a cover at the west end. This is a nice spot to meditate, indeed I found an elderly biker doing just that one early spring day.

Eilean nan Gabhar (Goat Island)

This is a popular anchorage, not surprisingly as it is so close to Ardfern, but you can get it all to yourself in the spring or autumn. There is nothing much special to do but you can scramble around on the rocks, both on the east side of the island where the anchorage is and rather better just over the rise on the west side with great views up and down Loch Craignish. The undergrowth is rather impenetrable in the summer.

Eilean Macaskin

As well as landing on the island from the Eilean nan Gabhar anchorage, there is a bit of an anchorage off a small wooden house at the northeast corner of the island, but don't venture too far into the wee bay — it's shallow! From here there are pleasant strolls up through woods and bracken to the north-south ridge from which there are great views, particularly from the north end up the loch. Just down the east side of the ridge towards the north end you will find a ruined black house. The crudely built walls are only a couple of feet high but the rounded ends are clearly there, there was a single door into the main house, and another internal door with its lintel leading into the byre. The island was apparently inhabited until the end of the 19th century.

Eilean Rìgh (King's Island)

I have never been very encouraged to land here, somehow it seems a bit too intrusive on the clearly very private (and no doubt prosperous) owners of this small island, whoever they may be nowadays. Silly really because I imagine they are hardly ever there, flying in and out to

¹⁰ <https://www.seawilding.org/seagrass-project>

¹¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22581/craignish-old-parish-church>

their helipad. And anyway given there is 'freedom to roam' in Scotland it should be OK to wander the island provided you don't get too near the house and garden. The island does seem to change hands quite often and in 2012 was up for sale for about £3 million but I understand was withdrawn from the market. Islands do indeed attract many but ultimately satisfy few. The all-black RIBs and motorboats on the pontoon have a rather sinister look about them, hardly encouraging. Another problem with the anchorage is the strange sound emanating from the fish farm when I was last there — seal-scaring I suppose.

Stewart's bay

This small bay more or less opposite Eilean nan Gabhar makes a nice stopover with the wind off the land from the east. Ashore there are fabulous wild flowers in the spring — a carpet of sea pink, meadows full of bluebells. Hidden in the deciduous woodland are old and crumbling stone walls, so presumably this area was once farmed, although it is a very remote part of Argyll these days. Watch out when you haul up the anchor — there will be a lot of very mucky mud stuck to it.

Loch Creran

Last updated 6th January 2024



I'm really not sure if Loch Creran is worth the effort, unless you are desperate for a very classy meal at the Isle of Eriska Hotel. Somehow it is a rather dull loch for visiting boaties, albeit with nice mountains at the far end (but guarded by the road bridge) heading up towards Glencoe, and lovely woods too. The

roads down each side are obtrusive, and so are the houses. It is generally too populated for my taste. Anyway, anchoring in the loch is very restricted because it is now a Marine Special Area of Conservation. There are bedrock and biogenic reefs, the latter made from the tube-worm *Serpula vermicularis* (known as serpulid reefs) and the horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* (known as horse mussel beds) which can be all too easily damaged by anchors. Maybe boaties should leave the place to the worms and visit by road.

Barcaldine

Creran Marine (ph 01631 720308) has visitor moorings and boat services¹ but there seems little to attract one ashore. It all seems a bit 'industrial' these days.

Creagan

There seems to be nowhere to walk here except along the busy road — hopeless. And the traffic is noisy. This must be more for Mr Toad than Ratty (if you have not read *Wind in the Willows*, you are not a genuine boatie). But there is the pub to repair to. In 2008 the old 18th century Creagan Inn² was completely taken to bits and rebuilt in a rather unattractive style, with a huge deck jutting out into the loch (ph 01631 730250). Architectural vandalism I'm afraid. The restaurant and bar were over-large and soulless. Not surprisingly it closed down in 2010. However, it was then sold and reopened under much more promising new ownership in 2011 — to Allan and Liz Crichton. Since then it has gone through more than one change of ownership. I have not been there recently enough to know how things now stand. It only

¹ <https://creranmarine.co.uk/>

² <https://www.creaganinn.co.uk/>

seems to be open from Wednesday through Sunday, so check before you go. Covid has hit these sort of places very hard.

Glaceriska bay

A pleasant enough bay, attractive deciduous woods to wander around in, but that is almost it. However, you could walk along the small road through the woods to Port Appin and the attractions there, about 30 minutes max (see Lower Loch Linnhe). And en route, at the top of the hill in about 15 minutes, there is actually something rather good to look at — Druimneil House³. This is a calm and lovely 1850 country house. You can't go inside but the extensive gardens are free to enter and wander round. They are mostly woodland with shrubs, there is a lovely pond with dragonflies and a boy hanging on to a dolphin, and a walled garden too with plants for sale. The 25+year restoration is still ongoing so not all of the beds are planted. And my espaliered apple trees are better pruned than theirs, although I am just an amateur! But, thank you so much Mrs Glaisher for letting us in, as ever shame on others around here who have closed their gardens to the public. So go there and donate to the upkeep of the gardens which must cost a bomb, best in the spring and early summer. And stay there too if you want a night ashore in a luxury guest house

Isle of Eriska

Not in the Sailing Directions, but there are moorings and a pontoon just after the entrance to the loch on the south side (watch out for the wash from work-boats going far too fast). The moorings belong to the very upmarket five-star Isle of Eriska Hotel (Spa and Island) sitting on its own private island of Eriska, connected to the mainland by a 1900 bridge⁴. Built in 1884 to a design by Hippolyte Blanc (what a marvellous name!), it was owned by the Buchanan-Smith family since 1973, who improved it bit by bit. In 2017 the whole place was sold to a Chinese family for a reported £2.2 million — they didn't aim to change the ethos, but were planning to do some renovations.

The website provides how-to-arrive instructions for helicopters, so you get the style. Very exclusive. However, do not be alarmed, boaties are welcome and ties are not needed for dinner in the hotel (one Michelin star, lost it in 2017, regained in 2019, currently lost again). So pretty classy food for sure at £75 for a three-course dinner, and an extensive wine list (01631 720371). The style is Baronial country house — the building, not the food. This really is a classic hideaway place, completely cut-off from everywhere by trees, so no views from your dinner table, except of the tiny putting green.

The walk around the island is brief and charming. Loads of wild flowers, and lovely trees with birdsong. Note the six-hole golf course which can be used — for a fee — by anyone, not just the residents. The 7th to 9th holes were out of action when I was last there, sunk in a bog — maybe the whole golf course is too, it is not mentioned on the hotel website. Check out the leisure centre which again can be used by non-residents and where you will find the Deck Restaurant, a much less formal place than the main hotel, and with a nice view, last orders at 1900, ideal for families with children, and for morning coffee.

³ <https://www.appinaccommodation.co.uk/gardens.html>

⁴ <https://www.eriska-hotel.co.uk/>

South Shian

This is the bay on the east side of Eriska, an anchorage dominated by boats on private moorings, and not all that interesting. There is a small slipway in the southeast corner just by the islets where you can land although it may be part of someone's garden (the house was an old inn, built in the mid 19th century). Then there is a walk of about a mile up a very quiet road (turn left at the cross roads) to have a look at a spectacularly perfect late 19th century restoration of the early 17th century Barcaldine Castle, a classical L-shaped tower house⁵. This was described in the Black Book of Taymouth, 1855, as 'ane greit hows in Benderloch in Lorne of four hows heicht'. It is privately owned and does up-market bed and breakfast (up to a minimum of £294 per night) which must be fun as well as costly (ph 01631 720598).

⁵ <https://www.barcaldinecastle.co.uk/>

Loch Etive

Last updated 6th January 2024



"To enter this loch is no easy task for a stranger, and as there are many more lochs quite as deep, quite as beautiful, and far easier of access, I should recommend that Loch Etive is looked at from the sea and left alone." So wrote Frank Cowper in 1896¹. It must have been reading that, and the dire warnings in the modern Sailing Directions, that persuaded me for years to avoid the Falls of Lora² at the entrance to the loch. But, summoning up courage and with my co-owner at the time, on one flat-calm sunny day in May, carefully planned at neaps, we gingerly motored under the Connel bridge³ and on through the Kilmaronag narrows to enter the loch. It was not a problem. Not so difficult as it appeared at first sight. Even the narrows at Bonawe

¹ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qipICFHRpxM>

³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23278/connel-ferry-bridge>

were a doddle, keeping left to avoid electrocution. I certainly didn't make such a mess of it as C. C. Lynam 120 years ago: *"The falls of Lora were in full roar, the tide being almost low. Hugging the south shore I was whirled along head to wind, which ought to have been aft, the dinghy led the way, and down the swirling decline went the Blue Dragon, stern first; only a few yards off was the great green waterfall over the central rock"*.⁴

It was then truly extraordinary to find myself amongst some of the highest mountains in Scotland, many of which are very accessible from the anchorages. All alone sailing up the upper loch with grand views ahead, and yet within a few miles of the hundreds of boats parked in Dunstaffnage Marina. This has got to be the best sea loch in the area, and one of the best in all of Scotland. There are a number of 'official' anchorages, and innumerable unofficial ones. Unfortunately I can't explore them now my mast is too high to get under the bridge.

Achnacloich Bay

Nothing much to see or do here, all the action seems to surround the mussel farm. You could walk round to Achnacloich House gardens but these are much easier to access from Stonefield Bay. Anyway, they were closed by the new-in-2012 owners, the public are no longer welcome (except on Saturdays).

Achnacreemore Bay

Not much to see and do here. If you go ashore you will find rather large and mostly architecturally-undistinguished houses strung out along the road. Houses that have surrounded themselves with high hedges so no one can see in, or with wooden fences for a quicker effect. And then called names like Wychwood, the Haven, and Beech Wood. Poor posties — nae house numbers here. There is no shop, no pub and no feel of neighbourhood. But maybe I exaggerate, almost certainly I do. No doubt a nice place to live, but nothing here for a seaborne visitor.

Airds bay

Bonawe Iron Furnace⁵ is nearby. It is of considerable historical interest, has been restored, and is looked after by Historic Environment Scotland. It was a charcoal-fired blast-furnace built in 1753, and it carried on until 1876, making mostly pig iron. The cannon balls used by Nelson's navy in the Battle of Trafalgar were made here. Indeed, what is said to be the first monument⁶ to the battle and Nelson's death is a 'converted' standing stone in Taynuilt,

⁴ The Log of the Blue Dragon 1892-1904. C C Lynam, AH Bullen, London, 1907. Amazing and amusing account of cruises in the Hebrides, often in winter and sometimes single-handed, with many groundings, cock-ups and near misses. The 25ft centre-plate engineless yawl was built in land-locked Oxford, sailed down the Thames, round Lands End and up to Scotland, and the author "never had a paid hand on board, and never but once signalled for a pilot"! He was an unconventional and no doubt inspirational headmaster of the Dragon School in Oxford, which is why his cruises were all in the school holidays (these days I like to think he would have taught in a comprehensive school). He didn't like Cowper's Sailing Tours at all "His knowledge of the west coast and its people is gathered from two hurried cruises and merits rather the name of ignorance contains nothing useful that is not taken from the official Sailing Directions."

⁵ <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/bonawe-historic-iron-furnace/>

⁶ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23495/taynuilt-nelsons-monument>

the nearby village. The charcoal for smelting came from the woods around about, there was plenty of water for the waterwheel to run the bellows, and the iron ore was shipped up from Cumbria. Wandering around the old buildings, now peaceful and quiet, and the lumpy ground which must be covering more ruins and slag heaps, it is difficult to imagine that this was once a hive of activity — lots of very sweaty men working very hard probably. Apparently 600 of them, and others around in the woods as charcoal burners. 'Pevsner' aptly remarks on the '*monumental quietness*' of the buildings, '*more ecclesiastical than industrial*'.⁷ It is all very well signed and certainly worth wandering around. Kelly's quay is the long turf-topped pier which was built for the ships to bring in the raw materials, and take out the pig iron — and the canon balls

Taynuilt⁸ is a bit of a walk, about 20 minutes or more, but there is a good general store, an excellent butcher, a post office, and the well-regarded Taynuilt Hotel which burned down and is being reconstructed in 2024. But in truth I don't see a lot of point in making the effort unless you really need provisions. There is also a 9-hole golf course⁹ not far from the shore.

Ardchattan Church

Not an official anchorage but you can anchor off the church.¹⁰ Sadly, in 2019, the church was sold off by the Church of Scotland, redundant to requirements, far too big with a capacity for 420 people, and too expensive to maintain (£115 000 the lot, but without the graveyard, but I don't know if it is still for sale). Built in 1836, it is severe, symmetrical and rather peaceful inside which is now of course locked (the wooden pews and central 30ft-long communion table are lovely) and outside (where the graveyard is well looked after).

Ardchattan priory

Again this is one of those places on Loch Etive where it is perfectly possible to anchor even though it is not in the Sailing Directions. Ardchattan House is said to be the second oldest house in Scotland, based on a 13th century settlement for Valliscaulian monks¹¹. It is now privately owned but the gardens¹² are open to the public thanks to the generosity of Sarah Troughton who presumably makes little if anything out of the donations (ph 01796 481355).

There are a lot of shrubs and trees. The south facing part in front of the house is more formal and yet very serene and attractive. It is enclosed by a beautiful east wall through which there is a gate to the remains of the originally 13th century church or chapel, with later bits. This was once part of the priory¹³ itself, before it became secularised in 1602 and partly converted into a private house which, according to 'Pevsner', is '*a strange and enchanting mixture of*

⁷ 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need are Argyll and Bute by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and Highlands and Islands by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taynuilt>

⁹ <https://taynuiltgolfclub.co.uk/>

¹⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/141079/ardchattan-parish-church>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valliscaulian_Order

¹² <http://www.gardens-of-argyll.co.uk/view-details.php?id=470>

¹³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23259/ardchattan-priory>

ecclesiastical and domestic forms'.¹⁴ What you see now is mostly 19th century. Behind the main house you will find a very inhabited 'doocot' (dovecot in English) and tucked a bit further away in the trees, a kind of Hansel and Gretel cottage. Because the house is privately owned you shouldn't be wandering around after the gardens have closed (at 5pm).

Sailean Ruadh

This is much more intimate than the adjacent Airds Bay, completely quiet and surrounded by beautiful broadleaf woods which are carpeted with wild flowers — primroses, violets and celandine in May. Just up from the head of the inlet is what must be a man-made dam which forms a little lochan set in trees, which is very charming. Otherwise there is nothing specific to do or see here. But I am afraid in 2013 there was a threat to this anchorage — an over-large fish farm across the entrance. Planning permission was granted in 2014 but apparently one can anchor beyond the obstruction. Because my mast is now too high to get under the Connel Bridge, I can't go and look for myself.

Stonefield Bay (Linne na Craige)

You need to anchor as far away from the road noise as you can, best by the Abbot's Isle from where it is possible to get up to Achnacloich Gardens (strike up behind the boathouse and you will come to a little-used zigzag path which leads to the house and gardens)¹⁵.

But alas the gardens were closed to the public in 2012 when the owner died. I gather from local gossip that the house was then passed on to a relative, who lived in London and is apparently a banker. Oh dear, these days it is difficult indeed to love bankers. The house now seems to be a top-end rented holiday property, sleeping up to 18 people — snooker table, nursery, six bathrooms sort of a place. However, on Saturdays between 10 am and 4 pm you are allowed to get a squint at the gardens.

The house itself is rather dull, late-Victorian Baronial Gothic, but the woodland gardens are delightful. There are some tremendous trees here, Scots Pine and a nearly-200-year-old Douglas Fir just by the house. There are some nice lookouts over Loch Etive, with seats.

Upper Loch Etive

The loch above Bonawe is fabulous — remote, mountainous, empty and beautiful. No riffraff here. Curiously this is one of the few places where the old Martin Lawrence and the Clyde Cruising Club Sailing Directions diverge, the latter suggest far more anchorages. For example, Camus an t-Seilisd is a wild and beautiful place, fabulous views all around, and yet easy to find and anchor in. I am sure there must be a lot of mountaineering explorations that one could start from these shores. Frank Cowper rated this loch highly too: *"The scenery is as wild and beautiful as can be wished, and forms a great contrast to the more sylvan landscape of the lower loch"*.¹⁶

¹⁴ 'Pevsner' *ibid*.

¹⁵ <http://www.achnacloich.com/garden/>

¹⁶ Frank Cowper *ibid*.

Loch Leven

Last updated 2nd March 2022



Describing Loch Leven, the 19th century Admiralty Sailing Directions strayed into purple prose: *"Probably in no part of the world, certainly not throughout the Western Highlands, is Loch Leven surpassed in magnificence of natural scenery, containing, as it does, all that tends to charm the eye or inspire the mind. Mountains of surpassing grandeur, with wooded base and sterile summits, surround its shores, their deep shadows increasing in intensity the naturally sombre waters of the loch, whilst Glencoe, ever dark and gloomy, seems still more so as one recalls the frightful tragedy enacted within its recesses"*. Glencoe is indeed a magical name for anyone in to mountains. One might then imagine that Loch Leven, at the bottom of the glen, has a lot to offer the yachtsman. It doesn't really, apart from the pleasure of sailing amongst well-remembered and magnificent mountains, and admiring them from a different angle. The views and the scenery are grand indeed, and although there are rather few anchorages to explore, one is spectacular, at least in what there is to see and do — Eilean Munde.

Camas na h-Eirghe

The big attraction since 2006 is the Loch Leven Seafood Café (more a restaurant I would say)¹, four miles east of the bridge on the north shore of the loch (ph 01855 821048). There are free moorings for customers. It has definitely classy food, and is not inexpensive. The seafood platter is so enormous that it could easily be shared by two, not a bad plan. There is also a small shop selling their ultra-fresh shellfish, and various deli delights, which is part of the same rather friendly operation. And a coffee shop too. In 2011 it was Scottish seafood restaurant of the year. A must for the gourmet sailor.

¹ <http://www.lochlevenseafoodcafe.co.uk/>

Eilean Chonneich (Kenneth's Island)

I don't think there is much point in trying to get ashore, better to stay on the boat, drink in hand in the cockpit, and admire the grand surrounding mountains. Slightly spoilt by noise from the main road on the south shore of the loch.

Eilean Munde

This is one absolute must, not that there is a particularly safe overnight anchorage, but a stop is essential. Forget about the view of the grim Isles of Glencoe Hotel, ignore the noise from the road, and just take in the mountains all around — and definitely land on the island. Its name comes from St Fintan Mundus of Argyll, an Irish disciple of St Columba. Talk about atmospheric, and photogenic. This little island is not just a wonderful place to view Loch Leven from, with beautiful broadleaf and pine trees. But it has tombs, loads of tombs, being the traditional burial place for the people of Glencoe. The tombs lie scattered all around, mostly from the 19th century up to about the 1970s. Many stones are upright and easy to read, some have fallen down, and others are slabs lying on the ground. There is a 16th century ruined chapel² too, abandoned in 1653 and very overgrown. So just sit amongst the wild flowers and breathe in the scene, in April it is awash with celandines. Curiously this place is not mentioned in 'Pevsner'³, maybe because you need your own boat or somebody else's boat to get to it.

Kinlochleven

It takes some persistence — which I have never achieved — to sail right up to the head of Loch Leven to find yourself at Kinlochleven⁴, hardly the most attractive village on the West Coast although the mountains around about are stunning. Apart from scenery, and saying you have done it, there seems not much point in sailing all that way.

The village was built in the early 20th century to house the workers at the hydro-powered aluminium smelter. The alumina was brought in by sea. The smelter closed in 2000 and the site is now derelict, although the power station is still working. If you want to discover more then check out the Aluminium Story Visitor Centre which has a small but informative display. This whole place rather reminds me of Sheffield, on a smaller scale of course: industry arrives in a beautiful part of the country, a population grows up to service it, industry leaves, and the dwindling population then struggles to reinvent itself, here at the very time the village had been bypassed by the building of the road bridge over the entrance to Loch Leven in 1975. This reinvention has taken the form of an outdoor pursuits centre with one very remarkable feature — the world's largest indoor ice climbing wall. The rest is not really worth the effort for the boatie, although it probably is for the thousands of walkers who pass through here on

² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23541/eilean-munde-st-munds-chapel>

³ 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need are Argyll and Bute by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and Highlands and Islands by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

⁴ <https://www.kinlochleven.co.uk/>

the West Highland Way⁵ — the not very exciting pub, the boarded-up shops, dull domestic architecture and locked churches.

The Ice Factor⁶ may look closed-up and a bit down-at-heel in one of the old aluminium plant buildings, but inside you will find not just the 12-metre ice wall but an ordinary climbing wall too, a bouldering wall, a café and a bar. A rather good place for a wet day where you can get climbing instruction too. Outside there is an enormous aerial adventure structure which I have not seen in action, look at the video. Too old to try it myself.

If you fancy a nice walk, take the track south of the river up to the Blackwater Dam⁷ which was built to power the smelter. Just before it you will find the lonely 'Graveyard of the Unknown', with mostly nameless concrete headstones marking the graves of the 22 men and one woman, out of about 3000, who died building the dam — without machinery⁸.

Poll an Dùnain (Bishop's Bay)

Just through the bridge, which is much newer than it looks having opened in 1975, this anchorage is a nice spot alright (apart from the domineering orange house). But, because there are a lot of private moorings, it is very difficult to anchor, almost impossible in the summer. With any luck there might be a free private mooring.

North Ballachulish⁹ is hardly an attractive village but in a small complex of craft enterprises just by the Loch Leven Hotel, you will find the F.W.Holroyd Art Gallery¹⁰, established for over 100 years but only in this location since the early 2000s (ph 01855 821277). Also do visit Starfish¹¹ — Dave Shepton and Davey Todd (who once built boats) make more lever harps than anyone else in Scotland (also known as Celtic harps or clarsachs). You will find these master craftsmen just behind the art gallery where they are more than willing to show you around their workshop, and sell you a harp (or electric violin, viola or cello if that is your fancy).

The Loch Leven Hotel¹² is prettily situated above the old ferry slipway, presumably it was much busier and touristic before the bridge was opened (ph 01855 821236). You can best walk to it along the foreshore, definitely not along the road. The attractive path starts by the small isthmus joining the islet of An Dùnain in the south west corner of the bay to the mainland. En route take a turn round the islet to find the cup marks¹³ on a rock by a metal post, facing south. These are prehistoric¹⁴ and notwithstanding the effort that must have gone into carving them out of the rock their function is unknown.

⁵ <https://www.westhighlandway.org/>

⁶ <https://www.ice-factor.co.uk/>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackwater_Reservoir

⁸ <https://cameronmcneish.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/hills-of-the-dead-end-remembering-patrick-macgill/>

⁹ <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/balachulish/balachulish/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.holroydgallery.co.uk/>

¹¹ <https://starfishdesigns.co.uk/about-us/>

¹² <http://lochlevenhotel.co.uk/>

¹³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23548/north-balachulish>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cup_and_ring_mark

New owners took over the hotel in 2013, escaping from an Edinburgh law firm (check out the legal tomes in the library). Sprucing the place up, launching a nice website, they are much in evidence and seem to be doing very well. They have added a library dedicated to Scottish literature and books about Scotland (most encouraging), nice prints on the walls, a gin and rum distillery, and 50 varieties of gin as well as real ales — something for everybody, and child friendly. And the food is good.

South Ballachulish (Baile a'Chaolais, Village of the Narrows)

Tying up to the pontoon below the architecturally desperate Isles of Glencoe Hotel¹⁵ (ph 01764 651843) is a bit like coming to rest in a slate quarry, which of course is exactly what this once was, indeed most of Ballachulish¹⁶ was. But I am told a better bet is half-a-mile to the east where you will find visitor moorings off the Glencoe Boat Club¹⁷ and a loading pontoon with water and power (a donation is expected).

Behind the not at all bad information centre and café in the village you can walk round the very impressive old slate quarry which started production in the late 17th century, and dwindled to nothing by 1955. And ponder on the whereabouts of all the slate that once came out of this place — slates from here and the Easdale area must have roofed most of Scotland until recently (now it is all dull uniform foreign slates from Spain, China and other countries). Roofers can easily tell the difference between these two types of slate. A small track to the left towards Glencoe leads in a few minutes to a rather remarkable slate arch built in 1822, now in the care of Historic Environment Scotland. Slate from the quarry was transported over the arch to the shore, and so on to boats for export, before the railway arrived in 1903.

The unexciting village has a very good Co-op, and a hardware store. And The Laroche¹⁸, a rather nice restaurant which caters as much for children as for adults who want a good meal by a Michelin star chef — particularly note the very classy desserts (ph 01855 811940). And there is a bar.

The mountaineering-minded could quite easily do the splendid Ballachulish Horseshoe, but that would take most of the day. The golfers might like to try the Dragon's Tooth 9-hole course, now with the rather dull and Surrey-like name of 'Woodlands'¹⁹, but it is a bit of a walk along the main road to get there (walking I am told is what golfers enjoy).

You can get a meal and a drink in the Isles of Glencoe Hotel, and maybe a bath too if you ask — there is a small swimming pool which might do instead. And there is an adventure playground for the kids just up from the pontoons, with a nice view of Eilean Munde surprisingly close, close enough to see the gravestones if you know what you are looking for.

¹⁵ <https://www.islesofglencoe.co.uk/>

¹⁶ <http://www.ballachulish.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/glencoeboatclub/>

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/British-Restaurant/The-Laroche-Restaurant-and-Bar-942031679150347/>

¹⁹ <https://www.woodlands.scot/golf-course/>

This is not a wildly attractive place to stop for the night, too much noise from the very busy road is a minus, but then there are not many safe anchorages in the loch and this is one of them, and it is a good place to stock up.

Loch Melfort and Loch Shuna

Last updated 6th January 2024



*"In the land-locked waters of Shuna Sound and loch, and Lochs Melfort and Craignish, the most beautiful scenery and easy sailing can be enjoyed with safe anchorages all about, and tides for the most part mild."*¹ Frank Cowper got it absolutely right over a century ago. Like Loch Craignish, the two adjacent lochs of Melfort and Shuna are pretty rather than dramatic, well sheltered, and with quite a lot of anchorages to dot around in. Mind you the tide in the Dorus Mòr is anything but mild if you want to sail between Loch Craignish and the other two lochs.

Ardinamir Bay

A peaceful spot but not the same since Irene MacLachlan² had to leave her cottage overlooking the bay in 1992, and move into a nursing home where she died at the age of 87 in 1997. This indomitable lady lived alone, with MacKelvie her cat, and no electricity. She maintained a keen interest in all the boats coming to anchor in the bay, indeed one was expected to sign her visitors' book (the nine volumes are now with the Clyde Cruising Club), and have a cup of tea.

¹Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill,

² <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/12285045.irene-maclachlan/>

She had binoculars by the window to keep a very sharp eye on what was going on, with particular and gleeful attention to any boats that went aground at the quite tricky entrance. Very appropriately, she was made an honorary life member of both the Clyde Cruising Club and the Royal Highland Yacht Club. Libby Purves put it well in 'One Summer's Grace', the lovely book she wrote about sailing round the UK with her young family in the late 1980s *"Record keeping, faithful down the years, has made a plain old farming spinster with a keen eye and a satirical grin into something approaching a tribal matriarch"*³. Now Irene's house is spruced up and looks like a holiday home, complete with satellite dish.

It surely worth the short walk to the top of the hill, not so much to inspect the rather nondescript pile of stones which was once an iron age hill-fort, Dun Ballycastle⁴, but for the truly spectacular view — from Loch Melfort, to Shuna, to Scarba, to the Fladda lighthouse, to the mountains of Mull and across to Clachan Seil. Stunning.

Ardmaddy Bay

I presume one can anchor here although I never have and there is no Antares chart, or mention in the sailing Directions. However, it seems to me a good spot from which one could walk to Ardmaddy Castle to examine the gardens⁵. The castle itself is privately owned but apparently can be rented.

Asknish Bay

There are two excellent things to do here. Visit Arduaine Garden, and eat — no, dine — in the Loch Melfort Hotel.

The garden⁶ was started in 1895 by James Arthur Campbell who had bought the land and named it Arduaine (pronounced Ardoonie), meaning green promontory, which is exactly what it then was — bare land. He also built the house which became the Loch Melfort Hotel in 1965. As usual for the West Coast, the success of the garden depended on planting numerous trees as a windbreak. The trees are magnificent. Now, tucked away in their shelter at the bottom of the rocky promontory, are some very pretty water-gardens connected up by tiny tinkling streams. A stone heron presides over one of the larger ponds. The garden belongs to the National Trust for Scotland who took it over in 1992 from the two Wright brothers. In 1965 they had rescued and greatly improved the garden after the Campbell family could no longer keep it going. Sadly, in 2009, the Trust looked as though it was going to close the gardens because of its financial difficulties, a threat temporarily withdrawn almost at once, and in 2011 reversed altogether — closure would have been a travesty and a lot of us Trust members made a big fuss. There must be better ways to save money, and the Trust's rather conservative fuddy-duddy image should be sharpened up.

³ My favourite sailing-round-Britain-book has to be 'One Summer's Grace, a family voyage round Britain', Hodder and Stoughton 1990, by Libby Purves, particularly for her observations about small children on boats.

⁴ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22618/luing-ballycastle>

⁵ <https://ardmaddy.com/places-visit/>

⁶ <http://www.arduainegarden.org/>

The hotel⁷ has laid some very convenient moorings in the bay but if there is a lot of southerly weather you may have to anchor round the north side of Rudh'Arduaine in North Asknish Bay (see below) where the moorings these days do not belong to the hotel, but are tempting nevertheless. There is a small jetty and a farm track steeply up the hill to the hotel and garden.

The hotel advertises itself as having the best view in Scotland, and this may well be true if you avert your gaze from Craobh Haven, that ghastly pastiche of a Scottish fishing village. And don't look too hard at the hotel itself which when it started as the Loch Melfort Motor Inn added the very ugly 'Cedar Wing' to the side of the splendid Edwardian House. The owners were presumably trying to ape the American concept of a motel because with car parking next to your bedroom door this is exactly what it looks like.

Calum and Rachel Ross, who took over in 2009, are extremely accommodating and helpful, the hotel is very child and pet friendly with a small outdoor play area, and the food is excellent — definitely worth a detour. Not surprisingly it has twice won the Scottish Independent Hotelier award. For a relaxed evening, sink into a deep couch in front of the open fire and peruse the menu while sipping your apéritif (ph 01852 200233).

Bàgh an Tigh-Stòir

This attractive wooded bay is an easy alternative to Craobh Haven (see below) if you prefer to anchor rather than tie up to a pontoon (or there is no room). Of course, if you did want to visit the village you have to blow up your dinghy and row ashore where, round the bay itself which is just a touch suburban with new houses sprouting up, there is nothing of interest other than a building down by the shore which has been used as a wedding venue.

Balvicar

This seems a rather messy, scrappy sort of place with little to do. It is not as attractive as the other 'slate villages' hereabouts, like Cullipool and Easdale. There is no pub, hotel or even café but there is a general store. And a family-owned boatyard which could come in handy (ph 01852 300557). There is an interesting looking 9-hole golf course⁸ if you are into that sort of thing — the Isle of Seil Golf Club. And out of the village to the 'main road' turn left and left again, there is a quite nice graveyard with some old slabs and a very small bit of a medieval church — Kilbrandon old parish church⁹. A very short walk to the southeast of the village brings you to the remains of a 17th century fort¹⁰, but why it was built and how long it was used for I have no idea.

Craobh Haven

I'm afraid I find this place a sad and bleak 1980s pastiche of a Scottish fishing village. Just to embellish the awful architectural mishmash, the houses are set too far back from the sea from which they are separated by a car park which makes matters even worse. Even sadder when one reads Cowper who in the late 19th century described the pre-marina anchorage as "a

⁷ <https://www.lochmelfort.co.uk/>

⁸ <https://www.1golf.eu/en/club/isle-of-seil-golf-club/>

⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22600/seil-kilbrandon>

¹⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/event/1128140>

perfect little port"¹¹. And in 1923 the first Clyde Cruising Club directions called it a '*snug anchorage*'. Alas no more. If only those houses could be replaced with some low-level, imaginative modern architecture, and the car park grassed over and landscaped.

So there seems rather little to commend Craobh as a place, although the marina¹² itself is fine I am told, well used too, and very prettily situated if you keep your back to the car park and admire the view (ph 01852 500222). And, as has been pointed out to me, the alternative to the marina might have been an ugly sprawling fish farm which would bring in far less local employment. Be grateful for small mercies.

The Lord of the Isles¹³ pub is large and open plan, so not particularly cosy, but the views are attractive. The food is definitely good pub grub, the ale is real, and the staff friendly (ph 01852 500658). And in 2019 it won the Catering Scotland Pub Excellence award. It has now opened a shop which sounds helpful. There was once a general store in the village itself until it closed down in 2010 (unsurprising as hardly anyone actually lives there, although I am told that those that do are really trying to make the place work). There is a small craft shop — The Giving Tree. Riding stables¹⁴ are close by for those that way inclined (ph 07590 023515).

John Betjeman's "*Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough to get it ready for the plough*" comes to mind. However, I really must go back on a warm summer's day and try again to like this place, I know it does have its fans. Indeed one, who wished to remain anonymous emailed me in 2018 "*What an appalling and trite review of Craobh! ... Your review drips with profound discourtesy and rudeness and I think you should be ashamed of yourself*". And Shane Spall in 'The Princess Matilda Comes Home' thought it "*has to be the loveliest marina in the country*"¹⁵. So I definitely will try to try again. In the meantime be aware there are strong views on either side of the argument.

If you want to park yourself in a nearby marina rather than anchor, then Ardfarn in Loch Craignish has more on offer ashore although it is further in from the open sea if you are just passing by — both Ardfarn, and Kilmelford Yacht Haven in Loch na Cille (see below), have boatyard facilities.

Or anchor just south of the marina in Bàgh an Tigh-Stòir (see above).

Cuan Sound (the Sound of the Ocean)

Surprisingly calm water here, just as it was in the late 19th century when Frank Cowper threw down his anchor in a panic after dicing with an adverse tide in the Sound itself — but there are now houses unless you go on further in to seek complete solitude. Not much to do ashore, probably best to sit in the cockpit and admire the view. And pour a stiff gin and tonic if like Cowper in 1896 you "*..look back upon this little adventure as one of the most unexpected and trying I ever had to encounter in all my cruises.*"¹⁶ And contemplate buying the island of Torsa

¹¹ Cowper. Ibid.

¹² <https://www.craobhmarina.co.uk/>

¹³ <http://lordoftheisles.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.lungaridingstables.co.uk/>

¹⁵ The Princess Matilda Comes Home by Shane Spall, wife of actor Timothy, is charming and funny — a delightful read. Ebury Press, 2013.

¹⁶ Cowper. Ibid.

to your east, essentially uninhabited since the 1960s — offers over £1.5 million in 2023 (rather less than a garage in Kensington I suspect).

Fearnach Bay

Melfort Pier and Harbour Resort¹⁷ has nice 1980s architecture which blends in very well, but somehow it's all a bit sterile, maybe because it is entirely a holiday development of up-market self-catering houses (particularly suited to the disabled which is good to see). I believe some are being sold off as private homes. Maybe in a couple of hundred years this place will have a local population and some character, or it will be as much a ruin as the black houses. It is perhaps worth a look if you are passing this way.

About 15 minutes along the road to Kilmelford, past Melfort House¹⁸ which is younger than it looks (1960s) and is now run as an excellent B&B with dinner, you will find Melfort Village¹⁹, a timeshare development constructed from the ruined 19th century gun-powder factory on the River Oude. Tennis court, indoor swimming pool, spa, playground, and snooker table are among the attractions for the residents. There is a restaurant open to non-residents, the Gunpowder Café and Bar (ph 01852 200345) which I have not tried. Or, you could walk the two miles into Kilmelford where you will find the village shop, and the Cuilfail Hotel²⁰ which does meals and has real ale in a cosy bar (they may give you a lift if you call them on 01852 200274).

Kames Bay

This may be a reasonable anchorage but there really is nothing to do here, and it is too near the main road with traffic noise. There are far better places hereabouts to explore, like Shuna or Ardinamir.

Loch na Cille

You can pick up a Kilmelford Yacht Haven²¹ mooring here, and they can fix things on boats, as well as having toilets and showers and so on (ph 01852 200248). The village of Kilmelford with the Cuilfail hotel²², restaurant and cosy bar with real ale (ph 01852 200274), is I reckon a bit too far to walk, only a mile maybe, but along a main road with no pavement. You might get a lift from the hotel if you phone them (ph 01852 200274). Better, the Yacht Haven may take you free of charge. The village has a shop and possibly a cafe²³. Otherwise not much to do.

North Asknish Bay

The activities here are exactly the same as for Asknish Bay — where you anchor just depends on the wind direction.

¹⁷ <https://www.mellowmelfort.com/>

¹⁸ <https://www.melforthouse.co.uk/>

¹⁹ <https://www.melfortvillage.co.uk/>

²⁰ <http://www.cuilfail.co.uk/>

²¹ <https://www.kilmelfordyachthaven.co.uk/>

²² <http://www.cuilfail.co.uk/>

²³ https://www.facebook.com/kilmelfordvillagestore/?locale=en_GB

Poll na Gile

The anchorage in this small, very sheltered and wooded bay on the east side of Shuna is tucked in behind the fish farm, which does rather detract from the view. But at least it is quiet and away from the crowds in Craobh Haven across the loch to the east. The vegetation is quite dense ashore so not much point in walking anywhere, typically lush Argyll — and there is nothing particular to see. But a good place to collect dead wood for a barbeque.

Shuna Island

The only official anchorage on Shuna²⁴ is the bay at the north end of the island although there must be other places too, like Poll na Gile. Nowadays there is just one farm and one family with seven cottages for more-or-less off-grid holiday lets²⁵ — remarkably each one comes with "a 17 foot aluminium-hulled open assault craft with a small outboard motor"! There does not seem anything very specific to see and do on Shuna Island (don't confuse this Shuna with the Loch Linnhe Shuna). From the north anchorage, where there is a decaying hulk to inspect, you can walk through rather difficult terrain of bog, bracken and bushes to Shuna House, an Edwardian wreck, with collapsed ceilings and mouldy furniture — hardly worth it really. It's just a mess, not even mentioned in 'Pevsner'. The roof is still on and so I suppose some rich person might make something of it before it is too late. There are adjacent farm buildings, with a dog. Otherwise Shuna is a place to wander around, or just to sit and admire the view from the cockpit.

Toberonochy

Another of the slate villages, not so extensive as either Easdale or Cullipool (see Firth of Lorne), but with just the same sort of early 19th century quarriers' cottages spread around the bay and village green. There are no what you might call 'facilities' here in the way of a pub or café, indeed there are none on the whole Island of Luings²⁶, apart from the Atlantic Islands Centre at Cullipool. Unfortunately, the only primary school teeters on the edge of closing down for lack of pupils even though the local population is about 200. But do get off your boat and walk up to the ruined, possibly 12th century Kilchattan Chapel²⁷ and graveyard, past the impressively large 1850s farm buildings. There you will find some authentic — so it is said — pre-reformation graffiti on the outer walls of the chapel depicting sailing ships along with some apparently meaningless geometric shapes. There is also an interesting plaque commemorating the Helena Faulbaums, wrecked on Belnahua in 1936 (see Belnahua, Firth of Lorne).

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuna,_Slate_Islands

²⁵ <http://www.islandofshuna.co.uk/>

²⁶ <https://isleofluings.org/>

²⁷ <https://ancientmonuments.uk/127120-luingold-parish-church-of-kilchattan-800m-north-west-of-toberonochy-oban-north-and-lorn-ward#.YeFmwBPP02I>

Loch Sunart

Last updated 6th January 2024



Loch Sunart can sometimes be something of a disappointment, at least the upper part, maybe because it tends to be the place to retreat to when the weather is too inclement to go north round Ardnamurchan, or around the west side of Mull. There are not that many official anchorages, while the road along the north shore may only be a single track but somehow it is intrusive. And, of course, the wind tends to blow either up or down the loch, so one way or another you will be tacking unless you are very clever with the weather forecast. But, and it is a big but, the loch is incredibly beautiful, and sailing on flat water in a brisk breeze is a delight. There are wonderful deciduous woods on either side, not too spoilt by pine plantations — yet. I suspect there must be a number of rather lovely occasional anchorages along the much more remote south side. But I feel this is a great place for walking, mountain biking and camping, not so much for attractive or interesting anchorages.

Ardnastang Bay

Not a lot here. Just an old ruined slipway, some woods with noise from the road above, and maybe something of a beach over in the northeast corner. Too far to walk to Strontian. However, there is an interesting bit of local history. In the mid-19th century a 400-seat floating kirk (in truth a corrugated-iron shed) was built for and used by breakaway members of the Free Church because the local landowner refused to allow them to build a church on his land. A few years later the shed was driven ashore in a storm and any remains must have all now rusted or been taken away. However, in 2016 one of its anchors was found on the seabed in the bay, and there are plans to display it in Strontian.

Camas nan Geall

I know not why this bay is not included in the Sailing Directions. On a calm day with northerly weather it is superb, a wide-open bay looking over towards Tobermory. The single-track road above the bay is far enough away not to be obtrusive, and anyway there is not much traffic, at least not out of the holiday season. Ashore there is a somewhat sandy beach, OK for sand castles, and behind that a well-tended field with sheep. But not just sheep. Over the centuries the farmers have kept away from and have now enclosed an 18th century burial ground with a couple of interesting headstones and even a standing stone on which is carved a Christian

cross, and also some trees surrounding a broken-down chambered cairn¹. These, along with scattered domestic ruins, give the place a sad sort of a feeling, but the views are not to be missed — on a good day of course. There is an iron-age fort on the headland to the southwest which I have not got to yet.

For the Gaelic cognoscenti, Camas nan Geall is incorrect because this bay has been known locally for centuries as the Bay of the Stranger — of St Columba himself — so it should be Camas nan Gall. Geall apparently means promise.

Carna West Kyle

This is another place called 'Dòirlinn', Gaelic for a tidal causeway or island. The one cottage was a ruin for years but is now being restored. In the 19th century it was an inn, and it has also been a shop, a school, a holiday centre for school children, and a private house. Near the shore, hidden in the bracken on the path up to the cottage, is the first of some remarkable cast-iron milestones indicating the distance to Drimnin, 6¾ miles along a Land Rover track. Presumably there was once a significant community here. This track makes an attractive walk through deciduous woods along the shoreline to Loch Drumbuie (it was once one of the 'coffin roads' along which men carried coffins to their final resting place in a cemetery). After that the track goes up over the treeline and passes the remains of villages which were cleared in the mid 19th century — Sornagan, Portabhata, Auliston and Carraig.

Eilean Garbh (rough island)

This ought to be a nice anchorage but you can hear the traffic on the main road above, and presumably you can even be the object of interest from the public hide on the shore when the wildlife spotters tire of otters, herons and seals. So no sex on the foredeck please, nor even in the cockpit — these people have serious binoculars. It is actually well worth going ashore by the hide, which is a very well-built and attractive structure, and then taking a stroll along the well-signed and made path to the southeast, about 15 minutes, through very pretty regenerating woodland

Glenmore Bay

Although this bay is, by Hebridean standards, a bit industrial with some sort of operation down by the shore (wave turbines I am told), and by the main(ish) road, there is one thing to see (I think it is still a going concern). Set up by the well-known Scottish photographer, Michael MacGregor, it is the privately-owned Ardnamurchan Natural History Visitor Centre ² (from the pontoon, up the hill, turn left at the main road, 10 minutes). The fixed CCTV cameras are particularly good — one is under water in the local burn to see trout, but may now be out of action. And there is an underwater view of a pond too. This place clearly major on eagles — golden and sea. The coffee, lunch and tea café does the usual things (chocolate cake etc) and the shop also does the usual things (tea towels, gem stones, photographs). The audiovisual show of Ardnamurchan uses Michael MacGregor photographs to good effect and the music is nice, but there seemed to be dirt on the screen when I was last there. In fact it is all looking a bit tired, not quite as good as I remember from earlier years. However, it was taken over by new owners in 2016 and I am told things are looking up and may not be now quite as I have described them. Great if true. Go and see for yourself, and I should too.

¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22350/camas-nan-geall-cladh-chiarain>

² <https://ardnamurchannaturalhistorycentre.com/pages/frontpage>

Kilchoan

Kilchoan Bay³ is a pleasant spot with a small scattered population, and with I suspect a considerable proportion of holiday, incomer and second homes. It is the most westerly village on the mainland of Great Britain and until about 1900 was only accessible by sea. There is a CalMac ferry to Tobermory which might possibly be helpful for crew changes.

About a quarter-of-a-mile from the slip to the right, behind the old manse which itself is a fine restored house surrounded by beautiful mature trees — the back part is 1790 and the front part was added in 1830 — is the ruin of the Old Ardnamurchan Parish Church⁴. This was built in the 18th century. It is surrounded by a lovely old graveyard overlooking the Sound of Mull where, maybe 20 yards from the south wall of the church, there are a couple of Iona-school graveslabs, casually lounging in the turf. They must have been lying around here for 600 or so years and so far have not been carried off to be put on display somewhere else. The 'new' Parish Church is early 19th century, about a quarter-of-a-mile further on. The garden is trim, the trees lovely, and the three galleries and pulpit are nice (but I think it is now closed for 'health and safety' reasons).

More or less opposite is the Kilchoan Hotel⁵, originally an 1870 shooting lodge, for a drink, and they do meals, but I have not tried it recently (ph 01972 510 200).

Liddesdale

A quiet spot, tucked under the woods with a burn rushing through an arched bridge to the sea. There seems to be a well-restored holiday let here, along with a rather large ruined house and a barn. The road along the shore goes to nowhere much, so OK for a stroll.

Camas na h-Airbhe (the bay of the walled enclosure)

Pretty good shelter here, satisfactorily remote — but rather blighted by a very large fish farm. Never mind, it provides employment, although at the expense of pollution and also probably of the wild salmon population. Locally it is known as 'Invasion Bay', because during World War 2 it was used for amphibious landing exercises.

Although the eye is drawn to the dense plantation of pines, the bay itself is fringed with nicer deciduous trees and so there is plenty of wood for a barbeque, and it's good for a bit of a wander about. Someone obviously thinks you might get lost here — there are signs on a track up a bit from the anchorage warning you that you are in a remote area. Indeed you are, so don't get lost!

³ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/kilchoan/kilchoan/>

⁴ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22130/kilchoan-old-parish-church>

⁵ <https://kilchoanhotel.co.uk/>

Loch Drumbuie

Loch na Droma Buidhe (loch of the yellow hill) — commonly known as Loch Drumbuie — is an intriguing but over-popular anchorage, not surprisingly as it has long been known as "*an extraordinary good place to ride in*"⁶. If you want to get away from the crowds of Tobermory it's not bad but maybe there are better alternatives. However, it is ideal for windsurfing or dinghy sailing because there is no way you can get blown out to sea! Otherwise there is not a lot to 'do' here. The southwest corner has a suitable rocky beach for a barbeque with plenty of wood lying around, and the deciduous woods along the south shore and up the hill are lovely. I am not sure why this loch is such a popular anchorage — maybe because it is near Tobermory but is not Tobermory, or maybe because it has a fascinatingly narrow entrance (Caolas nan Conn, strait of the dogs), but I guess mostly because it is very well sheltered from all wind directions.

One can get to the track between Drimmin and Doirlinn easiest from the anchorage about half-a-mile inside the loch on the south side, and take the very nice walk to the West Kyle of Carna and a view of Loch Teacuis. Or walk the other way, up the hill and westwards to explore the abandoned villages of Sornagan, Portabhata and, almost hidden in the forest, Auliston. Sornagan is the nearest, found on the left hand side of the burn as you go up the hill, a collection of four ruined houses, one quite big. They were only occupied for the first half of the 19th century. How people survived here is hard to imagine, quite a way from the shore for easy fishing and no obvious ground to till. All were 'cleared' in the 19th century.

Loch Teacuis

This loch is seriously tricky to get into. There are not just one but three critical points which all require serious concentration on pilotage if you take the east side of Carna. Ignore the chartplotter and follow the Sailing Directions I reckon or even better the Antares chart, and best at low water neaps when you can see most but not all the dangers, and it is not too shallow. On my first visit, I managed to avoid the rock at the south end of Caol Charna on the way in, and so pleased was I with myself that I then hit it on the way out — hubris before nemesis. My co-owner had done exactly the same some years earlier so I felt OK about it. I have never attempted west of Carna which is said to be even trickier.

This area is remarkably remote but even so there are some houses scattered around the innermost section of the loch, plus some small boats on moorings. Once over 100 people lived round here, now almost none.

There are tracks along each side of the loch, good for walking. On the south side you come to the Barr River, and if you follow the track a short way upstream you will find the abandoned village of Barr. On the north side there is a most attractive, mostly 19th century big house — Rahoy⁷ — with a wonderful metal sculpture of a stag by the waterside, by Helen Denerley⁸.

⁶ Murdoch Mackenzie, *Nautical Descriptions of the West Coast of Great Britain from Bristol Channel to Cape-Wrath* (London: 1776). These are the very first 'Sailing Directions'. Mackenzie was an Orcadian cartographer and hydrographer, and the first to produce recognisable charts of the seas around the British Isles while working for the Admiralty. You can find many of the charts on line at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. Mind you, some of his metrics for distance would strike one as quaint. For example, the rock in Canna Harbour now incorporated into the pier he described as being "*about a pistol shot from the shore*".

⁷ <http://www.rahoy-estate.co.uk/>

⁸ <https://helendenerley.co.uk/>

A bit further along the small road to the south, past some very undistinguished holiday cottages, on a small knoll covered with oak trees, just before a house called Carnliath and a sign 'to the office' you will find a very rustic broken-down **chambered cairn**⁹. No signs, no excavation, rather magical, sitting there for a few thousand years. Moss-covered stones. Do not be intimidated by being told to go away, which has happened around here. In Scotland you have freedom to roam as long as you do not wander into someone's garden, cause any damage, or get too close to a private house.

Serpulids, tube-like shells containing colonies of red and orange worms forming coral-like reefs, were found in the upper basin of the loch in about 10ft of water in 2006. There are very few other places in the world where you can find them, one of which is Loch Creran. Fortunately hardly any boats come here to anchor and the beasties are not in a normal anchoring area anyway. So presumably the reefs will remain more or less undisturbed. Unfortunately, in 2015, silly attempts were made to close off the whole loch to yachtsman instead of designating a few areas for anchoring as in Loch Creran — not good. Thankfully resisted successfully.

Mingary Bay

Mingary Bay is a nice anchorage when the wind is not in the south, and very well placed for wandering up to take a look at Mingary Castle¹⁰ rooted to its rock in an amazing position commanding the north entrance to the Sound of Mull and Loch Sunart. It was started in the 13th century and then altered in the 16th, 17th and again in the 18th centuries before falling into disuse in the mid 19th century — not so very long ago. Although it was besieged a few times, there was a lot of castle left, but for years it was not possible to get into it. However, the Ardnamurchan estate¹¹ has now restored it, at I imagine considerable expense, and turned it into a high-end restaurant with four bedroom suites. If you book ahead as a non-resident (ph 01972 614380) you may be able to get dinner at £85 per person for an 8-course menu.

Surprisingly, in front of the entrance across the rock-cut ditch lying in the grass, there is — or was — a very large old cannon. Before that it had been spotted under the castle by the sea. Where did it come from? The castle or one of those Spanish Armada ships that was meant to have fetched up around here? It is now more suitably relocated on the castle terrace.

Oronsay

Sailean Mòr, the gut on the north side of the island, can be a quiet spot, away from the crowds in Loch Drumbuie (see above). But it seems crowded if there is more than one boat at anchor. The island is difficult to get around because of the wild vegetation but the walk up to the ruined cottages is worth a go — you can see them from the anchorage, on the east side of the gut. There is at least one black house (with the curved corners) and one white house (with windows, and generally much better built). I have no idea what the story of this island is, maybe it is too obscure for anyone to know much about it. But, once again, the population was 'cleared' by the end of the 19th century.

⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22471/rahoy>

¹⁰ <https://mingarycastle.co.uk/>

¹¹ <http://www.west-highlands.co.uk/index.php>

Salen

The situation in Salen Bay was much improved in 2010 when Jan and Mark Drury took over the pier. There are now pontoons¹² as well as moorings. In 2014 there were new toilets, showers, a shop and a small tearoom. Someone is being very busy here.

However, I must confess I have not in the past been an enthusiast for this place, rather put off by warnings of horrible things on the seabed ready to trap your anchor, and by the fact that all around the inlet appears to be private so there is nowhere to go ashore except at the pontoons (mind you the slipway is a Thomas Telford construction from 1820, so stop to admire). And there seemed little to do except walk along the main (by Ardnamurchan standards) road. However, the Salen Hotel¹³ is I am told by several people a whole lot better than it was a few years ago when I was last there, and very recommended for a meal (ph 01967 431661). So, in truth, not a bad place to pull in if you are looking for a pontoon or mooring in a northerly gale, with dinner ashore.

If you are prepared to leg it for three miles along the road towards Strontian, you could visit the Resipole Studios¹⁴ — a very nice-sounding gallery which I have not been to, showing contemporary Scottish art. But check the opening times before you start walking (ph 01967 431506). Maybe you can anchor off Resipole bay, at least temporarily, I am not sure.

Strontian

What a strange place Strontian¹⁵ is, a 1960s village, the centre of which is about a mile from the anchorage. But at least it doesn't try to pretend to be what it isn't, and in fact it all seems rather together, tidy and pleasant. I wonder who was responsible for the plan and the way the whole place is laid out. There is a standing stone in the car park, later named the Pillory Stone because it was used to shackle villagers found guilty of gossiping — very strange!

The whole area has loads of history as a lead mining centre in the 18th and 19th centuries and, of course, with the story of the discovery in 1790, and then isolation, of strontium (by Sir Humphry Davey) in 1808.

There is a play-park and a small but well-stocked supermarket in the centre, a café and a very nice small pottery and craft shop selling things made locally — Woodland Pottery¹⁶. The trees are great, and there is a community woodland trail around the edge of the village.

The Strontian Hotel¹⁷ built in the early 1800s looks attractive, does meals and is near the anchorage (ph 01967 402029). Kilcamb Lodge Hotel¹⁸ and restaurant (ph 01967 402257) looks rather posh, is further away, and I have not been there but it seems worth a visit; it seems to have loads of awards.

The Strontian Agricultural Show takes place in August, followed by dancing.

¹² <http://www.salenjetty.co.uk/>

¹³ <http://www.salenhotel.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://resipolestudios.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strontian>

¹⁶ <http://www.woodland-pottery.co.uk/>

¹⁷ <https://www.strontianhotel.co.uk/>

¹⁸ <https://www.kilcamblodge.co.uk/index.php>

Loch Sween

Last updated 6th January 2024



A long way in — and a long way out — but nice if you are in a relaxed frame of mind, and not in a hurry. It's all very pretty with lots of deciduous trees each side of the loch. Gentle cruising. As Frank Cowper observed in *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896: *"The loch is broken up into so many bays, and even subsidiary lochs, and is so beautifully wooded in the valleys which alternate with hills all along its shores that it forms a charming scene to be explored.* Over a century later not much has changed, except for the march of the pine plantations. There must be many places to anchor, as well as those in the *Sailing Directions.* Tayvallich is good for stores, Castle Sween has a beach as well as the castle, and the Fairy Isles are aptly named.

Caol Scotnish

Although I can see it would be quite fun exploring this wooded arm of Loch Sween, there is not much point. There is a road all along one side which, although single track, does carry quite a bit of traffic to and from Tayvallich. Anyway, right next door is the far quieter Fairy Isles anchorage (see below), although it can get crowded in the summer. Also, there is nothing particular to see — or to do — which you can't also see and do from the Fairy Isles.

Castle Sween

There are only two reasons to linger in this anchorage — you are either very keen on castles, or you want an emergency beach-stop for the children. Otherwise avert your eyes from the huge caravan park which dominates the whole place. And beware the speeding jet skis. Castle Sween¹ itself is very ancient, built in the late 12th century, modified over the years and then abandoned in the mid 17th century. It still stands bound to its rock and no doubt will continue to do so for long after the caravans have disintegrated.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_Sween

Fairy Isles The name is apt. The dark green interlocking lagoons separated by small islands and dotted with rocks is indeed a magical place. Altogether a delightful spot. The anchorage is surrounded by enough deciduous trees that you don't really notice the dreary conifers of Knapdale. There is a forest road along its edge if you want a bit of a walk through the woods. On a still evening take a row around in the tender to look at the seals and birds. On a hot afternoon explore the shallow lagoon just to the north of the main anchorage and try and spot the flatfish, starfish, crabs and tiny shrimp-like creatures scuttling around on the seabed. In short, just dawdle. And watch out for the ospreys which definitely have a nest hereabouts. There is one drawback — the anchorage loses the evening sun.

Taynish Island

A neat little lunch-stop half way up Loch Sween, or for overnight. Just up the bay there is a strange circular and castellated structure, not a boathouse, but some sort of Victorian (I imagine) bathhouse. It belongs to whoever owns the mostly 17th century and attractive Taynish House² above the anchorage, which all looks a bit private, as does the nearer 'Round House' which is actually octagonal and was once a dairy and then a gun-room. The farm buildings are derelict. It is all so far away and private that it was once, it is said, the hideaway for the future King Edward VII's mistress (and I imagine for the mistresses of other posh blokes too). It is where John Lorne Campbell spent his childhood, the man who bought and then gave away Canna³. Walking along the shore is nice, as well exploring the Taynish National Nature Reserve⁴ which stretches all the way to Tayvallich — loads of nature and lovely walks, deciduous woodland, a huge ruined watermill, and lots of dragonflies⁵⁶.

Tayvallich

*On its west shore, round a little bay, island-locked, straggles the village of Tayvallich, a perfect anchorage, where on the wildest day you may ride secure while the seas make white tumult on the other side of the protecting rock-spit".*⁷ wrote John McLintock, in 1938. A bit different these days. If you could now imagine Tayvallich⁸ without all the moorings, none of which seem to be available for visitors, and particularly without the characterless modern houses

² <https://vimeo.com/139571266>

³ Ray Perman. The Man who gave away his Island, A life of John Lorne Campbell of Canna. Birlinn, 2010.

⁴ <https://www.nature.scot/search?query=taynish>

⁵ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/argyll/taynish.shtml>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2Hq2E2A2n0>

⁷ West Coast Cruising. John McLintock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938 is a between the wars account of not so much cruises in chronological order, but of the author's experiences on the west coast. However, there is too much history, fairy tales and misty Celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nonetheless, it gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing of what sort of boat he sailed, or with whom, and nor did he tell us anything about the people he met along the way. Or himself.

⁸ <https://www.tayvallich.com/>

outnumbering the older much more charming (but no doubt less well insulated) cottages, then it would indeed be 'a perfect anchorage'. Later, in the 1930s, Capt Harvey was writing: *"the builders of the new houses have not been very happy in their choice of materials"*⁹. 'Pevsner' puts it even better — *"A ring of indifferent holiday cottages now outnumbering the few surviving old rubble cottages. From the north caravans advance ominously"*¹⁰. The late 19th century church reflects well the takeover by the new at the expense of the old — I hope there was a good reason to replace half the wooden pews and their lovely polished brass umbrella stands with horrible modern chairs.

Sadly, there is almost no space to anchor and the pontoon can only be used for a one hour stay¹¹, as long as you don't leave the boat, so dropping in for coffee and some shopping is problematic, as would having a meal at the inn. Anchoring just outside the enclosed bay is however an option, if a little distant from the city centre.

There is a small but useful shop which can come in handy for fresh milk, and an excellent coffee shop¹² with a deck overlooking the bay but now only opening over weekends and Mondays (I think). Certainly there is a strong sense of community here with a sailing club, camera club and art classes.

One plus is the Tayvallich Inn¹³ although since it changed hands in late 2009 and then again in 2017 I have not been there (ph 01546 870282). However, it is one of only 16 pubs listed in the Michelin guide to eating out in pubs in Scotland, so it must be good. It is really hard to keep up with these small restaurants because they change hands so quickly, and I imagine it is very difficult to attract chefs and then get them to stay, or rather come back in the spring because so many of these places are closed for the winter.

Of course the anchorage is totally sheltered and easy to get into but somehow this is not enough, particularly when Loch Sween has other attractive options. However, if you do get stuck here on a bad day, there is the possibility of a bus ride into Lochgilphead and the swimming pool (aka MacPool)¹⁴.

All in all I am not sure that Tayvallich is really worth a big detour, especially with such a delightful alternative just round the corner — the Fairy Isles (see above).

⁹ Sailing Orders. Practical instruction to yachtsman, illustrated by the author's cruises on the West Coast of Scotland. Capt J R Harvey, Alexander Maclehose, London 1935. What it says on the cover, well written descriptions of summer holidays on not much money, and even without a 'paid hand' *"my young family and I have always managed somehow"*. There is also a lot of technical stuff on charts and how to make them, navigation, compass deviation, how to organise a boat — most of which is not that interesting. But information about many of the anchorages is still relevant. As was so common in those days the engine was unreliable and a lot of time was spent towing the boat with the dinghy, and by horse or even manpower along the Crinan canal.

¹⁰ 'Pevsner' is my generic term for all those wonderfully detailed books about the buildings of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were started by Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, and written between 1951 and 1974. The two volumes you need for these anchorages are Argyll and Bute by Frank Arneil Walker, Penguin Books 1992, and Highlands and Islands by John Gifford, Yale University press, 2003.

¹¹ <https://www.tayvallich.com/sailing/visiting-yachts>

¹² <https://www.tayvallichenterprises.com/cafe-home.html#visit>

¹³ <https://www.tayvallichinn.com/>

¹⁴ <https://macpool.org.uk/>

By the way, if you want to impress, the pronunciation of Tayvallich has an additional syllable — tay-*vee*-allich — after the original Gaelic Tigh a'bhealaich, house of the pass (between Carsaig Bay on the Sound of Jura and Loch Sween, over which the drovers used to drive their cattle to market).

Lower Loch Linnhe

Updated 26th January 2024



Sailing up Loch Linnhe on a good day is tremendously dramatic. Wonderful mountains closing in all around with beautiful broadleaf woods along Upper Loch Linnhe, particularly on the east side. John McLintock put it well: *'In Loch Linnhe one is not at sea at all. Surrounded by great hills, green valleys, and pleasant woodlands, the loch is more of the land than of the sea. Not the ocean, but the bens are masters here'*¹ However, there are surprisingly few anchorages

¹ 'West Coast Cruising'. John McLintock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938vis, a between-the-wars account of not so much cruises in chronological order, as the author's experiences on the West Coast. However, there is too much history, fairy tales and misty Celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nevertheless, he gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing of what sort of boat he sailed, or with whom, and nor did he tell us anything about the people he met along the way. Or about himself.

north of Lismore, at least delightful ones, even up Loch Leven which gets even more dramatic with views up to such well-known mountains — Bidean, the Ballachulish horseshoe and so on.

There are some pretty impressive places around Loch Linnhe to eat, and one could even construct a rather good week-long gastronomic cruise taking in the Pierhouse and Airds Hotel at Port Appin (one on the way there, the other on the way back), the Holly Tree House Hotel in Kentallen, the Loch Leven Seafood café, and the Crannog and the Lemon Tree in Fort William.

Ardmucknish Bay

I doubt if many people bother anchoring in this wide-open south-facing bay. And I can't say I blame them. Although there is a splendid sandy beach, it can be very crowded because there is a large caravan site as well as holiday lodges at the back of it (mid-week out-of-season should be good though). Mind you, the site is quite discrete because it is set back from the dunes, indeed you hardly notice the lodges from a distance because they are painted green. This is in marked contrast to the huge eyesore on the east side of the bay which you can see from miles away — from a distance, the white caravans look like tomb stones.

On the west side of the bay there is a prominent stately-looking home — Lochnell House² — where the Earl of Dundonald³ and his family live. Sailors should already know that the 10th Earl was Thomas Cochrane, a famous naval commander in the Napoleonic wars and later founder of the Chilean Navy. Patrick O'Brian used him as the model for his wonderful Jack Aubrey historical novels, including his false imprisonment. As you sail closer, the house begins to look a bit tatty, especially the battlemented Victorian add-on bit which is I think no longer lived in. There is also a 17th century bit and a Georgian bit. Apparently it is being gradually restored which is nice to hear. I don't think it is open in any shape or form to the public, except as a wedding venue. Sadly there seems at first sight to be nothing in the large walled garden, but I am told there is a vegetable garden and fruit trees (it would be nice if the owners of wonderful enclosed spaces like these would rent them out for allotments if they were not using all the space, but maybe here in the country there is no call for veggie patches).

About a kilometre southwest, on the hill, you can see Lady Margaret's Tower — erected in 1754. It is accessible by foot with permission from the estate manager I believe (ph 07791 481203).

Camas Bruaich Ruaidhe (Saulmore) and South Connel Bay

These are two adjacent bays and although there is more tide in the one to the east (South Connel Bay) it does have more to offer ashore. The one to the west (Camas Bruaich Ruaidhe) really has nothing other than a main road to see. But it might if plans for a marina, chandlery, golf course, golf academy, hotel and spa, and tourism dwellings come to fruition. Of course the eastern bay has the main road too but across that road is quite a cosy 18th century pub with rooms. The old appropriate name of the Ferryman's has been changed to the Oyster Inn⁴, but the bar is still known as the Gluepot. There are bar meals (a bit pricey I would say), and

² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22997/lochnell-house>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_of_Dundonald

⁴ <https://www.oysterinn.co.uk/>

Deuchars IPA (a decent Scottish real ale). Attached to the bar is a blue excrescence, which holds a busy and reasonable restaurant, with close-up views of the road (ph 01631 710666).

Just outside across the road is the old ferry slipway. It must have been quite a ride across the tide to the other side with the ferryman pulling on his oars, and maybe on his bottle too at times. From here walk up onto the bridge⁵ to view the tide roaring through the Falls of Lora, and also the vista out west. The bridge was opened in 1903 to carry the Callander and Oban Railway over the falls. It is said to be the second largest cantilever bridge in the world. Within 10 years of its opening it was carrying motor vehicles too⁶. But, in 1966, the cars won, and the railway closed (much of the track has reopened as a Sustrans long distance cycle path to Ballachulish).

The Falls of Lora have been a tourist attraction for more than 200 years. The Hon. Mrs Sarah Murray, a widow in her 50s, came here in 1796 and described the falls as *"...a cascade, as wonderful, if not more so, than any other in the world"*.⁷ She seems to have been addicted to waterfalls, and was firmly in the Romantic tradition, hence the overdone hyperbole.

South Connel Bay is a place to lurk while assessing which way the tide is running under the bridge if you are seized by a crisis of confidence on the approach. Also you might consider changing crew here if they are using the train — Connel Ferry station is very close

Camas Chrònaig

The coastline of Morvern, north from the Sound of Mull, is wild, uninhabited and beautiful, enhanced by rocky outcrops and deciduous trees. From a distance there look to be a series of sandy bays, but do not be deceived. The beaches are of stone, they are steep-to, and hardly ideal anchorages. But on a calm day there are a couple worth stopping at, even if just for lunch. Camas Chrònaig just south of Glensanda, is incredibly isolated. No access from the land, not even a path. Just bracken, stones and trees. Good for a barbeque though. Robinson Crusoe would have felt at home here.

Camas Eigneig

Camas Eigneig is south of Glensanda, about a mile further on past Camas Chrònaig. You can anchor off the stony beach towards its north end. There seems to be a mooring but, as ever, you will have no idea what it is attached to, and how strongly. So don't touch it, anchor like a proper sailor. And beware of the adders if you do go ashore.

Camas Nathais

An easy anchorage in a wide-open bay, ideal for a hot summer's day in northerly weather. But no one else seems to think so, the place always appears deserted. The arms on each side of the bay are covered in lovely deciduous woodland, close enough to the shore for barbeque

⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23278/connel-ferry-bridge>

⁶ <https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/5122>

⁷ The Hon. Sarah Murray. 'A Companion and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland and the Hebrides' Volume 1. 1799

supplies. Not much in the way of pine plantations to spoil the effect. There is a grey sand beach, not very good for sandcastles the children tell me, but nice walks in surprisingly pastoral surroundings — cows, sheep and so on

Camas Shallachain

This large and wide-open bay has its scenic charms, at least in northerly weather. Apart from walking about on the very green grass and the extensive foreshore at low tide, there is nothing to do in particular. But wrong! About half-way towards Corran Point, you will find Ard Daraich gardens⁸. They are said to be spectacular —you need to book to visit (ph 01855 841384). The walk up the glen towards Strontian is also pleasant.

At low tide there is a bit of sand for sandcastles, and certainly children can find a lot to amuse themselves with. There is loads of driftwood so on the right evening good for a barbeque. The beacon guarding the way to the Corran narrows is an odd kind of art deco concrete structure (I wonder who designed it, there is nothing quite like it elsewhere as far as I know).

Creag islands

This archipelago of small islands and rocks off the east shore of Lismore is the perfect spot for a picnic on a hot and windless summer day. There are lots of seals, a small sandy beach on the north end of Eilean nan Gamhna which is ideal for sandcastles, snorkelling and with spectacular views up Loch Linnhe and down the Firth of Lorne. The undergrowth in the summer is incredibly thick and so it is not easy to get around. It is all an SSSI — Site of Special Scientific Interest — and so care is needed to avoid disturbing the seals which are always in evidence, particularly it seems in the south-facing bay between Eilean na Cloiche and Eilean Dubh which is a peaceful place to anchor in quiet weather but there is weed and not so easy access ashore (in southerly weather you can of course anchor on the north side of the isthmus where there is a shingle beach). There are also a lot of birds — oystercatchers, terns and geese. Trees are being planted on Eilean na Cloiche, but by whom? Who owns this place I wonder?

Cuil Bay

Another wide-open bay facing south, but not with a sandcastle sort of beach, and with quite a few houses dotted around not very far away. Not much to recommend it really, just a passage anchorage probably. But I should imagine the walk between here and Kentallen (see below) might be rather nice.

Dallens Bay

Linnhe Marine⁹ is a small and friendly family-run water-sports centre with moorings and a loading pontoon (ph 07721 503981). However, it could be more interesting to anchor on the other side of the sound off Shuna, then go for a walk there (see Shuna Island below). Mind you I feel a bit guilty about that because the buoys to guide you into Shuna Sound from the south were laid by Linnhe Marine.

⁸ <https://www.greatbritishgardens.co.uk/inverness-shire/item/ard-daraich.html>

⁹ <http://linnhemarina.co.uk/>

You could just about take the dinghy across to the privately owned 15th century Castle Stalker,¹⁰ or walk from the mainland if the tide is low, something I have never done. There are limited tours (vital to book well ahead) and a welcoming website (ph 07721 730354). It appears on so many Scottish calendars because of its ridiculously romantic position in the middle of the sea (at high tide at least).

There is quite a nice café and gift shop called Castle Stalker View (01631 730444)¹¹ up on the road above the castle, unsurprisingly with a view of the castle. The Old Inn¹² is ten-or-so minute walk along the cycle path to the south of the marina, it has a good reputation, but I have yet to visit (ph 01631 730186).

Dunstaffnage

Our boat has been kept here for more than 30 years, not because it is of huge interest to the cruising yachtsman, but because it is the closest place to Edinburgh to keep a boat on the West Coast (and you can get here by train as well as car). What is more, it is quick and easy to get in and out with no tidal problems — turn right for Lismore and Loch Linnhe, straight ahead for the Sound of Mull, turn left for the Firth of Lorne. But don't try and enter under sail unless there is a reasonable wind or you have the engine on, because the wind dies at the entrance and there is more often than not a strong tide against you.

For the visitor there are some pluses. First, it is a convenient place to change crew who can get here by train, bus, car, or even private plane to Oban airport (a rather grand name for a mere airstrip at the mouth of Loch Etive in North Connel). But, from 2017, the pontoons at Oban may be more convenient (see below). Second, there is a bar, with real ale, and a restaurant which over the years has gone up and down in quality — The Wide Mouthed Frog¹³ — (ph 01631 561129). The views across the bay from your dinning table are great, and they have rooms too if any of your crew want to sleep in a proper bed for a night. Third, you can stock up with anything you need in Oban, just a ten-minute taxi drive away. Or walk by the path over the cliffs via Dunbeg and Ganavan Bay through very pretty oak and birch woodland — it takes a bit over an hour. Fourth, Alba Sailing¹⁴, a charter company, has a good selection of chandlery, and is very helpful. Finally, the marina¹⁵ should be able to help you out with water, fuel, electricity and repairs (ph 01631 566555). The one negative is the sound of the traffic on the main road, but even this does not drown out the seductive cooing of the eider ducks in the spring, and certainly not the oystercatchers.

In 2010 a very pretty garden centre called Poppies¹⁶ opened just next to the marina (in the green shed north of the big house). It does excellent café-style food (great meringues, the best in Scotland) but sadly it is not open in the evenings. Unfortunately you do have to walk round to it by the main road with no pavement, or perhaps better take the dinghy straight there (ph 01631 565718). It is buzzing which goes to show what enthusiastic people can do with this sort of establishment. Not surprisingly it is winning awards.

¹⁰ <https://www.castlestalker.com/wp/>

¹¹ <http://www.castlestalkerview.co.uk/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/theoldinnappin/>

¹³ <https://thewmf.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.alba-sailing.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://dunstaffnagemarina.co.uk/>

¹⁶ <http://www.poppiesgardencentre.co.uk/>

However, what people are in danger of missing is on the other side of the bay. Dunstaffnage Castle¹⁷, originally another MacDougall stronghold but owned by the Duke of Argyll since the late 15th century. It is a small but splendid semi-ruin, its massive and almost complete stone walls seeming to grow straight out of a huge plug of volcanic rock — as John Knox described in the late 18th century: *‘The castle is built upon a rock, at the mouth of Loch Etive, whose waters expand within, to a beautiful bay where ships may safely ride in all weather’*¹⁸. It is surely worth a visit, especially for the views from the castle walls overlooking the bay — *“a most splendid prospect”* according to Walter Scott in 1814¹⁹. Also plenty of latrine chutes to amuse the children, and they will enjoy playing hide and seek too. It was begun in the 13th century and, as usual, various bits have been added and fallen down over the centuries until it was more or less abandoned after a fire in 1810. Flora MacDonald was imprisoned here for her role in helping Bonnie Prince Charlie to escape after the disastrous 1745 Jacobite rebellion.

The castle is now lovingly looked after by Historic Environment Scotland. The 16th century crow-stepped harled house on the top is still owned by the hereditary keeper, the so-called Captain of Dunstaffnage, who lives near by. He had allowed the castle to fall nearly to pieces, perhaps because of lack of cash, until in 2012 Historic Environment Scotland gained some sort of control, nicely restored it, and in 2014 opened it to the public. A small triumph. At the moment it is empty but the house is a useful place to shelter from the rain. In the future there are plans to mount exhibitions here. Personally I reckon it would be a great place for a party, but I doubt if the Captain would allow it. Above the ticket office there is a room with a nice model of what the castle might have looked like in its prime.

Very near by, in the woods, is the now roofless 13th century Dunstaffnage Chapel²⁰ which is also worth a visit. Bits of gothic architecture remain, but the burial aisle to the east is an 18th century addition for the Campbells of Dunstaffnage. All this is surrounded by delightful deciduous woodland with loads of bluebells in the spring, and rabbits anytime. A wander around here on a warm sunny day is a definite highlight of any Hebridean tour — views of the bay with Connel bridge and Ben Cruachan in one direction, and the Firth of Lorne in the other.

The not completely unattractive modern building in the corner of the bay contains the Scottish Association for Marine Sciences (SAMS)²¹, Scotland’s only fundamental marine research institution. For the many scuba divers keen to explore the wrecks and underwater scenery, it has the advantage of the adjacent decompression sickness (the bends) treatment facility, hence the coming and going of rescue helicopters, although less often than in times past — maybe the divers are getting safer, or have moved off to warmer waters. At least they

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunstaffnage_Castle

¹⁸ ‘A Tour through the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebride Isles in 1786’. John Knox, James Thin, Edinburgh, 1975, is what it says on the tin. This was not *the* John Knox, but a Scottish philanthropist eager to set up fishing stations to exploit the untapped — at the time — potential for fishing. He clearly had huge sympathies with the impoverished local population, constantly thinking of ways to improve their lives.

¹⁹ ‘The Voyage of the Pharos’. Sir Walter Scott, Scottish Library Association, 1968. An account of his 1814 cruise around Scotland as a guest of the Commissioners of the Northern Lights, on the Lighthouse Yacht, Pharos. Rather more readable than his novels

²⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23047/dunstaffnage-chapel>

²¹ <https://www.sams.ac.uk/>

were until 2019 when 37 divers were treated. The Ocean Explorer Centre²², an outreach facility of SAMS opened in 2013, a marine visitor centre definitely worth a visit, and it's free. It may be small but it has plenty of stuff to ponder over, and good for children too. You can play at being a marine scientist by donning a white coat and then peering down a microscope at various algae, examine the mapping of the seabed of the Firth of Lorne, look at pictures from the under-water camera in the bay, the three dimensional globe, and the moving picture showing the ocean currents of the world. All good interesting stuff, plus a small café. This is all part of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Only 20-25 undergraduates a year, so terrific contact with the scientific and teaching staff. Very unlike some well-known universities where classes of 200-300 are lectured at.

Eilean Balnagowan

This is a nice anchorage, well protected from the west and southwest. There is some sort of ancient enclosure²³ on the north ridge. According to an email I got from Robin Watt: *"this was an iron/bronze age fort ... a medieval cemetery served by a coffin stance opposite on the mainland ... in the 18th century a local girl assaulted by a soldier from Appin barracks brained him with a boulder, and hid out on the island till the affair cooled down"*.

There are loads of birds in the summer and loads and loads of brambles in the autumn. However, a new small house was built in 2014 so there may be fewer birds nesting in future, and fewer brambles. It faces down the loch and is well hidden from the mainland — not a bad position for all concerned. However, there are plans to enlarge the cottage to a house which may not be such a good aesthetic idea. By the anchorage you will find a gravel beach at high tide, but no sand. There is traffic noise from the road on the mainland so it is not as remote as maybe it seems.

Eilean Dubh (Loch Linnhe)

Not much here, the vegetation is so thick you can't get easily through it, and the cliff is so steep it looks unclimable to me. But it is a pleasant enough anchorage with seals on the rocks towards Lismore and a lot of nesting seabirds in the summer. The beach is shingle — be careful not to step on any eggs.

Glensanda

Not in the Sailing Directions, and distinctly unpromising industrial scenery. But there is a castle to inspect on a knoll overlooking the Lynn of Morvern. It is tricky getting ashore along this bit of coast, here there is a stony beach but a bit steep for comfort. I prefer to row up the burn that flows down past the south side of the castle and land there. Then scramble up to the quarry road, over a wall, round to the west side of the castle and another scramble up to it where you are confronted by the Glensanda quarry²⁴. The only coastal quarry in the UK, the largest granite quarry in Europe. It opened in 1986, and is I fear a blot on the landscape. Six-and-a-half million tons of granite came out of it in 2014. And it won't all be taken out until at least 2100. You see it from more or less everywhere on the west side of Lismore, worse at

²² <http://www.oceanexplorercentre.org/>

²³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23331/loch-linnhe-eilean-balnagowan>

²⁴ <https://www.scottish-places.info/features/featurefirst18859.html>

night because of the lights used for 24-hour working. But, a big but, the rock is shipped out by boat which does avoid the granite having to be driven out on roads, indeed the quarry is essentially inaccessible by land. And it does employ a lot of local people, almost 200, with many more knock-on jobs locally. More good than bad I imagine. It looks pretty amazing when you sail close past it, a vast industrial complex with an almost cubist look to the buildings climbing up the mountainside. It would surely be a great location for a James Bond film.

The castle²⁵ is 15th century. There are two storeys, the walls have been stabilised, but there is no roof. It was a MacLean stronghold but they abandoned it around 1800. Given there is no sensible access from the land, that it is not in the Sailing Directions, and landing is not that easy except in calm conditions, you are unlikely to have to share the view down Loch Linnhe from the front door.

Kentallen Bay

I am not sure this has much to commend it, too near the busy Oban to Fort William road, too many moorings. But there is a small chapel tucked away in the woods, built in 1868, St Moluag's Church (locked but through the windows the inside looks a wreck). The walk between here and Cuil Bay (see above) looks good but I have not done it. You could also scramble up to the old railway line and try to walk along to the Holly Tree Hotel (ph 01631 740292)²⁶ about half-a-mile away. But much better is to pick up one of their five moorings, because the line has been cut by some new houses. The rather unattractive looking hotel with chalets was built around the old railway station, the remains of which are still visible inside. The hotel is said to be good for kids, there is a restaurant, and even a very small swimming pool.

A ferry to Fort William used to run from the small pier. You can stroll from the hotel towards the head of the bay along the old railway line from Connel to Ballachulish. It opened in 1903 and must have been a wonderful ride. It surely would still be an excellent tourist resource if it had not been swept away by the infamous Dr Beeching in 1966. Luckily Sustrans have converted the track as part of a long-distance cycle route, the Caledonia Way²⁷ — from Campbeltown to Fort William and Inverness. The section from the hotel northwards is now complete.

A very creaky film was made of the railway line in the winter just before it closed²⁸. Long ago one of my medical school teachers who, when he heard I was moving to Scotland, became quite nostalgic about this journey. When he had been demobbed after the war he was given a return rail ticket to anywhere in the UK. He chose Ballachulish as a suitably distant and peaceful destination. Later he became a physician to the Queen.

Loch a'Choire

You really feel in the mountains here. The surrounding hills seem so close that they positively beg you to leap up them directly from the deck. More relaxing, an evening stroll around the

²⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23081/glensanda-castle>

²⁶ <https://hollytreehotel.co.uk/>

²⁷ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/find-other-routes/the-caledonia-way/>

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utLbJQnT7oE>

head of the loch is a delight. Kingairloch House and the surrounding estate ²⁹ seem mysteriously affluent, and everything is very trim for such a remote part of the mainland, even the little roads are well surfaced. I imagine loads of money was made from the Glensanda coastal quarry³⁰ which the estate sold to Aggregate Industries in 2006. There are a lot of self-catering cottages³¹ as well as catered accommodation (if you want it) in the big house itself. And for boaties, the good news is that the Boathouse restaurant reopened in 2023³². I do hope is as good as it used to be. Way back, in the Second World War, the Royal Navy had a top-secret testing site here for two-man torpedo-like craft with detachable warheads, and for midget submarines.

There is an old broken down graveyard by the moorings, but with some more recent cairns mostly to members of the Strutt family who must have been big round here. Indeed Mrs Patricia Strutt was one of the most formidable deerstalkers in Scotland it seems. Shot her first stag in 1930 at the age of 19, and her last shortly before her death in 2000. During the second world war her mother, Emily Strutt, kept a bottle of poison handy to dish out to her employees in the event of a Nazi invasion (sealed in a lead box, the bottle is now at the bottom of the loch).

There is a walk to Kingairloch village³³ along the road, but it is a very minor one. There you will find a surprisingly well-looked-after church, right on the beach (Camas na Croise). Mid 19th century. A fabulous view too. I wonder who keeps the brass so gleaming bright. I gather all the cottages are now holiday homes. Sad, but realistic.

Onich

I can't see a lot of point anchoring off Onich. The views may be spectacular, down Loch Linnhe and up Loch Leven, but the main road is very intrusive — after all it is one of the main tourist routes in Scotland connecting the honey pots of Oban, Glencoe, Fort William and Loch Ness. But, if you do anchor here there is a bit of a walk on the shell beach and a lonely standing stone in a field to the west of the pier. And on the pier there is a strange metal fish gazing mournfully into the wind. The Onich hotel³⁴ looks quite nice but I have not been there (01855 432323).

Port Appin and Airds Bay

These two anchorages are on opposite sides of a small headland, within easy walking distance of each other. Both are exposed to the south. If you can stand the rolling about which can be a problem at Port Appin,³⁵ there are mooring buoys supplied by the Pierhouse³⁶, a very good place for a meal with I am told an excellent but not inexpensive seafood restaurant (ph 01631 730302). It also has a sauna, and washing facilities for yachties (at least it did but maybe no more). It seems to be moving up market, but I have only had a bar meal, which I guess they

²⁹ <https://kingairloch.co.uk/>

³⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glensanda>

³¹ <https://kingairloch.co.uk/self-catering/>

³² <https://kingairloch.co.uk/boathouse-restaurant/>

³³ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/strontian/kingairloch/index.html>

³⁴ <https://www.onichhotel.co.uk/>

³⁵ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/appin/portappin/>

³⁶ <https://pierhousehotel.co.uk/>

may not do anymore, and there were no real ales. Originally the building was a 19th century cottage for the pier-master when steamships used to call here. It was considerably improved and extended in the 1990s. New owners arrived in 2019 and the whole place is on the move upwards.

For the very serious foodie the Airds Hotel³⁷ beckons, just a few minutes up the road (ph 01631 730236). It has been in the Good Food Guide for over 40 years. Here you can get one of the best meals in Scotland, and they don't mind too much if you are a wee bit scruffy off a boat (no ties are needed thankfully). But maybe the food is a better experience if you stay at the hotel, the gastronomic effect is rather spoiled by a wet row back to the boat in a strong southwesterly wind. In 2014, a Michelin star, but no longer.

Just across the road from Airds you will find the very pretty top section of the old Sgeir Bhuidhe lighthouse (yes, another Stevenson). In 2002 the original lighthouse was replaced by one of those ugly modern low-maintenance eco-friendly solar-powered boxes designed by someone with no aesthetic sense whatsoever. Indeed, the proposed change was so resented by the local community that one day they woke up to find their dear old lighthouse had been repainted to look like Mr Blobby, a well known TV cartoon character at the time. Needless to say the Northern Lighthouse Board was not amused.

If you want to nip across to Lismore there is a passenger ferry³⁸ operating from the pier. And you can hire bikes in Port Appin.

Airds bay is a bit more sheltered than Port Appin, at least from the north and west. The fine big house overlooking the bay is 18th century — Airds House, privately owned so you can't really get near it. However, the walk round the headland is good³⁹. It takes about 40 minutes if you are not side-tracked by the two excellent eating establishments in Port Appin. Go ashore (with some difficulty) on the west side of the bay, pick up the track and turn left or right. To the left, near the headland is an impressive natural arch in the quartzite. A smaller more hidden one is to the right. The deciduous trees are lovely, clinging in some places to the limestone cliffs. In a short while you get to the Pierhouse. Further on, just before taking the path back off the road to Airds Bay, is the Airds Hotel. Also the village hall is near here where you can get local information, and there is a general store too. Plus the Lighthouse Craft Shop,⁴⁰ which is good and sells what it says on the tin. And a red telephone box converted to a book exchange. The Port Appin studio⁴¹, right by the pier, is run by Alex Gourlay, a landscape artist, and his wife Midge who is a textile designer. You can visit by appointment, or buy on-line (ph 01631 730594). The pastiche turrets on some of the modern houses by the pier leave something to be desired.

Another walk is along the road towards Glaceriska Bay on Loch Creran, and take a look at Druimnell Gardens (see Loch Creran anchorages).

³⁷ <https://www.airds-hotel.com/>

³⁸ <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/port-appin-point-lismore-ferry-timetable>

³⁹ <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/argyll/portappin.shtml>

⁴⁰ <https://appincraftshop.co.uk/>

⁴¹ <https://www.portappinstudio.co.uk/>

Sheep Island (Eilean nan Caorach)

This is a rather remarkable small island because at one time it must have been entirely taken over by lime-making, albeit by only two resident families. There are three kilns, one of which is certainly in a better state of repair than those at Port Ramsay. You can look down it from above as well as up it from the bottom! Behind them I think is the quarry from where the limestone was taken. Sheep are obviously kept here during the summer, and not surprisingly there are loads of nesting birds — mostly gulls I think. It is more an anchorage for lunch than an overnight stay, unless it is very calm. And take care, the last time I visited there were no marks that I could see for the leading line and Antares Charts have not yet made the approach easier.

Shuna Island

The anchorage here is a bit further away from the rather noisy main road than at Linnhe Marine, but you can still hear it — maybe that doesn't matter too much, the scenery makes up for that. Go ashore, turn left along the beach and visit Shuna Castle⁴², up a slight rise. This is a very crumbling and uncared-for ruin but it is rather atmospheric with vaulted rooms at the bottom, and a good view from the wrecked windows on the first floor approached by a spiral stair. It was built as a fortified tower-house in the late 16th century, and belonged to the Stewarts of Appin. The island changed hands in 2013 but that won't change the scenery. The new owners are anxious to avoid any liability if a bit of castle drops on someone's head, so watch out if you do visit.

⁴² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23289/shuna-island-castle-shuna>

The Small Isles and North of Ardnamurchan

Last updated 6th February 2024



It is said to be a something of a challenge going north around Ardnamurchan Point, but if you pick your time with a nice wind on the beam it is a piece of cake (But do remember you have to get back against any contrary wind which might have got a whole lot stronger). Indeed it was so easy on my first attempt that the crew renamed it 'Softnamurchan point'. So far I have not yet included many anchorages in this area except the so-called Small Isles, the wonderful quartet of exotic and strange names: Muck is small, pastoral and well farmed; Rum is much larger, mountainous and wild; Eigg is more of a crofting sort of a place; while Canna is both rural and wild with one of the best harbours in the Hebrides. And with a few other anchorages on the mainland I have added Loch Scavaig, the most dramatic anchorage in the UK apart from St Kilda, and perhaps Foula although I have never been there.

Arisaig

It is a long way in to Arisaig¹, maybe an hour or so, and it is not a good spot to get out of in a strong westerly wind. *"If the sea rover wishes to enter Arisaig harbour he had better obtain local help. It is an abominable place for a stranger"*². But perhaps short of cash Frank Copwer goes on to write *"With such help as the Admiralty Plan, No 2817, gives, however, it is quite possible to enter, and the chart is a good deal cheaper than a pilot"*. It is a reasonable place to change crew — there is a railway station for trains to Fort William. Otherwise I don't see a lot of point in coming here, while others take a completely opposite view and really love the place.

Of course there are nice sunsets over Rum to enjoy, and I am told a good boatyard — Arisaig Marina³, a family-run friendly business, with a small café and gift shop (ph 01687 450224). You will find a shop in the village, a restaurant in the Arisaig Hotel⁴ (ph 01687 450210), and I have had very good reports of the Old Library Restaurant⁵ (ph 01687 450651). If you fancy a walk then head south for half-a-mile along the main road to Larachmore Gardens⁶, unkempt but lovely, free, and — surprisingly — looked after by the Botanic Gardens staff in far away Edinburgh. The gardens were planted in the 1920s by John Holmes, a Glaswegian millionaire stockbroker, and well known eccentric.

And for the golfers, Traigh links a couple of kilometres north of the village has nine holes, a grand view, and is the most westerly golf course on the UK mainland⁷. While the golfers golf, the rest could walk a bit further on to explore the wonderful sandy beaches before ending up on An Camas Darach where much of 'Local Hero' ⁸ was filmed (that never-to-be-forgotten feel-good Scottish movie made at the height of the oil boom), and where my son Oli married Katherine.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arisaig>

² Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896. There is more here than just sailing directions, but little information about what there was ashore, and he did not much describe many human interactions. But his descriptions of sailing with no engine in strong tidal streams are pretty hair raising, particularly bearing in mind he was often single-handed. A lot of the pilotage information could be used today. His obituarist in *Yachting Monthly* wrote in 1930: "From his earliest days Mr. Cowper took cruising to heart and probably did more to popularize this particular way of life than any man of his day. It is almost inconceivable to us now the prejudice which then existed in the public mind against the man who did not employ hands aboard his yacht. But it was through this veteran singlehanded sailor's adventures and writings that the public began to recognize small yacht cruising as a sane man's pastime".

³ <https://arisaig.co.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.arisaighotel.co.uk/>

⁵ <https://www.oldlibrary.co.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.wildlochaber.com/mallaig-glenfinnan/attractions/larachmhor-gardens>

⁷ <https://www.traighgolf.co.uk/>

⁸ <http://www.scotlandthefilm.com/movies/flocalhero.html>

Canna

"The harbour of Cana is small, but pretty well sheltered, and commodiously situated for vessels bound either northward or southward; and on that account is more frequented than any of the harbours in that neighbourhood". So wrote Murdoch Mackenzie in 1776⁹, and he would have known because he was busy making the first proper charts of the Hebrides at the time. The same is true of Canna¹⁰ today. It has not only a magnificently safe and attractive anchorage, but it is also very special for me from the first time I sailed in on a chartered yacht in 1975. What a wonderful serene and scenic anchorage I found on that quiet evening in summer sunlight. Out at sea it may have been blowing hard, but once in the anchorage it was pastoral, surrounded by farmland so lovingly tended by the MacKinnon family who still farm it today. Years later I read Robert Buchanan's very similar feelings on his first visit in 1871: *"It is a difficult job indeed to pick our way among the rocks, in the teeth of wind so keen; but directly we round the corner of the cliffs, the little landlocked bay opens safe and calm, and, gliding into five-fathom water, we cast anchor just opposite the Laird's house"*¹¹.

Canna was also special in 1988 when I sailed my first young family there in our newly acquired Contessa 32. And it was very special for family holidays in the 1980s and 90s when Ben, Margaret and Oli were growing up. Year after year we rented Tighard¹² from John Lorne Campbell who had owned the island from 1938 until he gave it to the National Trust for Scotland in 1981.¹³ Sometimes just the family, sometimes with friends. It is the 1905 house peeping through the trees above the big laird's house. There are not many places on the west coast where you can rent a place to park the family with easy access to a safe anchorage for day or longer trips by boat, and Canna was then the best. We made up Canna Tig around Tighard; the hunter stood at the front door with their eyes shut to the count of 20 while everyone else dispersed to hiding places around the outside of the house. The idea was to get to the front door without being caught. Great fun on a summer evening. Tighard became a bed and breakfast establishment — which may had its uses for cold, wet and disgruntled crew who wanted a comfortable night ashore. The couple who had taken over Tighard in 2013 left in 2021, and it is now a guest house.¹⁴

Notwithstanding the tiny population of around 19 people, there is a surprising amount to see and do on Canna and the immediately adjacent island of Sanday which is connected by a newish bridge (the old one blew away in a gale). First up from the anchorage is the small church with the round tower¹⁵ — not as old as it looks, completed in 1914. It is rather pretty

⁹ Murdoch Mackenzie was an Orcadian cartographer and hydrographer, and the first to produce recognisable charts of the seas around the British Isles, as well as sailing directions, while working for the Admiralty. You can find many of the charts in the National Library of Scotland, and the book on line — 'Nautical Descriptions of the West Coast of Great Britain from Bristol Channel to Cape Wrath' 1776.

¹⁰ <https://www.theisleofcanna.com/>

¹¹ The Land of Lorne including the cruise of the Tern to the Outer Hebrides. Robert Buchanan, Chapman and Hall, London 1879. Perhaps the first account of west-coast sailing, surprisingly by a quite well known Scottish poet, novelist and dramatist. This was his only book about sailing, and in large part a panegyric for the area.

¹² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/137813/canna-tighard>

¹³ <https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/canna>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/tighardguesthouse>

¹⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/76044/canna-church-of-scotland>

inside, but I am not sure about the ornate 1969 gate to the churchyard. Currently funds are being raised to restore it, so please help. It is used for occasional Church of Scotland services.

The larger late-19th century Roman Catholic Church of St Edward the Confessor¹⁶ on Sanday — a seamark if ever there was one — had been sadly neglected for years until the National Trust for Scotland tried to restore it and turn it into a Gaelic Study Centre. Despite a grand opening by Princess Anne in 2001, the roof soon leaked, the building has never been used, it has been vandalised, and there was dispute between the National Trust, the Hebridean Trust, the architect and the contractor over responsibility for this terrible waste of nearly £1million¹⁷. It was then rebranded as the Camus Arts Centre, so we await developments, if any.

The small Roman Catholic Chapel¹⁸ on the track to the farm is the only active church on the island. It has been lovingly restored and is quietly attractive. Behind the chapel a track runs up to an old burial ground and the remains of an 8th or 9th century Celtic cross, and the so-called punishment stone¹⁹. It has a small hole into which the thumb of a miscreant was apparently wedged to persuade him — or her — to improve their ways.

The impressive big house — Canna House,²⁰ circa 1865 — contains an internationally-renowned collection of Gaelic literature, collected by John Lorne Campbell. His American heiress wife, Margaret Fay Shaw, was a renowned photographer and folklorist of all things Hebridean²¹. The house is now occasionally open to the public, mostly by appointment (presently closed for refurbishment I think). You can walk round the walled garden any time. A bit further along amongst the farm buildings is the 'Old Laundry' which has a small display of various crofting bits and pieces.

Much longer walks are to the souterrain and remains of a Viking grave near Tarbert in the centre of the island, but you need the OS map to find them.

More or less all the Scottish cliff-nesting seabirds can be found on Sanday. About half-a-mile east of the lighthouse there is a stack with loads of puffins, fulmars, shags, kittiwakes, razorbills and guillemots. It is second only to the Harp Rock in the Treshnish Islands for looking at nesting seabirds in this part of the west coast. Take binoculars and on the way be prepared to be bombed by great skuas (bonxies) unless they have been wiped out by the avian flu epidemic in 2023.

There are two delightful beaches, facing in opposite directions and therefore good in all winds. Facing south, what we used to call the pirate beach (black sand and great views of Rum) just over the hill behind the round tower church (with the sadly deteriorating barn and the now almost inaccessible and very tiny 17th century Coroghon castle²², once apparently a prison). Facing north, the white sandy beach just over the bridge to Sanday on the right.

¹⁶ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/76049/sanday-roman-catholic-church-of-st-edward-the-confessor>

¹⁷ Restoring Canna's Chapel, Alasdair Ross McKerlich, 2007.

¹⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/137809/canna-the-square-roman-catholic-chapel>

¹⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/10708/canna-a-chill>

²⁰ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/76045/canna-canna-house>

²¹ <https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/margaret-fay-shaw-the-shadow-in-the-corner>

²² <https://canmore.org.uk/site/10709/canna-coroghan-castle>

Amazingly, there is a small café cum restaurant²³ just along from the round tower church. In 2008 it closed after Wendy Mackinnon moved to Mallaig so her children could get to secondary school easier, an all too familiar problem in the remote parts of Scotland. However, in 2010 it reopened with Amanda McFadden and Aart Lastdrager in charge. Sadly in 2012 they too left. However, it then reopened again, had a licence and did evening meals (ph 01687 482488, but if no signal use VHF channel 8, call sign 'Café Canna'). But in 2018 it was up for grabs — again. However, it is now very much back in action.

Well, more amazingly still, there is a roll-on roll-off ferry pier even though there are no proper roads on the island! Well done somebody in 2006 for being generous to remote and rural communities. Before it was incorporated into this new pier, there used to be an entertaining rock which attracted the occasional boatie. It had been well known for years, indeed it was described by Murdoch Mackenzie in the first Sailing Directions in 1776 as being *"about a pistol shot from the shore"*.²⁴

Ten moorings were laid in 2013 although they do not seem really necessary to me, the kelp is not that bad if you take care, and there is already plenty of custom for the restaurant from anchored boats in the harbour overnight. The silver lining is there is loads of space to anchor because the moorings are in a semicircle around the old anchoring area. In fact a few of the moorings are too exposed in my view.

The National Trust for Scotland has tried to attract families to live on the island but this has not been easy. Many come with great enthusiasm but then soon leave, apparently 20 left after only two years. I guess you have to be a very accommodating person to live here, willing to muck in, not too eccentric, and able to face the problem of your children having to go to the mainland for secondary schooling. Some blame the Trust for poor management, others the resident population. Whatever, it is very sad to see the population dwindle to — at times — single figures.

John Lorne Campbell wrote the most authoritative book on Canna²⁵. He nurtured the island for decades before gifting it to the National Trust for Scotland and he continued to live in Canna House until his death in 1996. There is a nice biography if you want to read more²⁶. And if you want to see more without going there, take a look at the National Trust for Scotland's 3D virtual tour²⁷.

Eigg

The Eilean Chathastail/Galmisdale Bay anchorage has always struck me as rather unsatisfactory because it is shallow north of the pier and rolly south of the pier. This is a pity because Eigg is an extremely interesting island to visit, for the walk up the Sgurr among other good things. The island was once notorious for its awful lairds²⁸, greedy or bonkers or both, and here we are talking 20th century not the very old days. However, there was a celebrated

²³ <https://www.cafecanna.co.uk/>

²⁴ Murdoch Mackenzie *ibid*.

²⁵ 'Canna, the Story of a Hebridean Island'. John Lorne Campbell. Oxford University Press, 1984

²⁶ The man who gave away his island, a life of John Lorne Campbell of Canna. Ray Perman. Birlinn,, Edinburgh. 2010

²⁷ <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/virtual-canna-sanday-bcda7aea48e549be88c88346f0a6d707>

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/may/20/jamiewilson1>

community buyout by the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust in 1997 — for £1.5 million — and the island is now a much more harmonious place, as you can see from its very good website with all sorts of interesting videos²⁹. Indeed, the population increased from about 60 before the buyout to about 100 now. According to one commentator in 2017 "*Eigg's success has come from genuine fusion of Hebridean culture and mainland counterculture*."³⁰ Well, maybe (you can see why the Guardian features so often in 'Pseuds Corner' in Private Eye). The island now even has its own electrical grid fed by its own renewable energy sources (wind, water and sunshine), most impressive.³¹ And on Eigg you will find the doctor for the Small Isles, if you should need one.

The Galmisdale Bay Café and Bar³² is on the old jetty, and open on some evenings for straightforward home-cooked meals (but check opening times on their website or phone 01687 482487). There is also a toilet block, laundry, general store, craft shop, bike hire, and camping pods have sprouted.

The Poll nam Partan anchorage is certainly sheltered but seems to me rather too shallow, certainly at springs, but with the Antares chart a good spot can be found. There is a bit of a volcanic sandy beach for the bucket and spade members of the crew, but the beach behind the new pier is better if a little overshadowed by the pier itself — an overlarge roll-on roll-off confection. Walking up from Poll nam Partan you will find the 1790 Old Manse³³ which I and a few families rented for a holiday in 1981. Sadly it was then left to rot for many years until in 2014 a new owner started to restore it — hurrah! And it looks good judging from his blog³⁴. In 2023 the job was done. A bit further on across a small valley you will find the remains of Old St Donnan's Church, 16th century³⁵.

The Singing Sands are in Camas Sgiotaig, the bay just north of Laig Bay, which can be anchored off. But they didn't sing or even squeak for me when I walked on them — maybe I walked in the wrong way in the wrong place at the wrong time in the wrong shoes. However the beach is great and the cliffs behind impressive with their amazing shapes best seen in a low evening light, and the view of Rum is even more impressive. And, up the hill a bit, even more impressive again I understand is Lageorna, a B&B with a restaurant which welcomes non-residents (ph 01687 460081)³⁶.

Hyskeir (Òigh Sgeir — maiden rock)

Yes you can indeed anchor here, at least on a calm day (the Antares chart will get you there clasp your iPad or phone). Go in to the gut from the north, leaving the lighthouse³⁷ to port. It is so long ago since I did this that the light was still manned, but stupidly I never took any photographs — I must revisit. The three keepers were delighted to see us and took us right up

²⁹ <http://isleofeigg.org/>

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/sep/26/this-island-is-not-for-sale-how-eigg-fought-back>

³¹ <http://isleofeigg.org/eigg-electric/>

³² <https://galmisdale-bay.com/>

³³ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/81906/eigg-old-manse>

³⁴ <http://manseadventure.blogspot.com/>

³⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22152/eigg-kildonnan-st-donnans-church-and-burial-ground>

³⁶ <https://lageorna.com/>

³⁷ <https://www.nlb.org.uk/lighthouses/hyskeir/>

to the light. What a view, like from an aeroplane. Everything was incredibly clean, not a speck of dust, brass gleaming. I wonder what the inside looks like now in these automated days since 1997. I also wonder what happened to the visitors' book which went right back to when the light was established in 1904, as well as the war book with instructions of what to do in the event of an outbreak of hostilities. Again, it is a Stevenson light, David and Charles this time. As well as the lighthouse, make sure to enjoy the wild flowers and the hexagonal stones on the island, and note the overgrown vegetable garden.

Inverie

Knoidart is not what it once was. Back in the 18th and 19th centuries the population peaked at about 1000, far too many for the land to support. People left voluntarily, or were cleared out by the sheep- and deer-obsessed landlords. The population dwindled to about 80. By the second half of the 20th century everything was almost over as somewhere for ordinary people to live. The estate was by then owned by crooks who ended up in jail. But in 1999 came the Knoidart Foundation³⁸ community buy-out of the estate that covers about one third of the peninsula. Now the whole place has busily recreated itself as the last wilderness in Britain, with the inevitable result. It is a honeypot for not just the real intrepids, but also the pseudo-intrepids who arrive by cruise ship. There is self-catering, even with hot tubs. However, this all brings in an income to support the population of about 110 who are now mostly incomers of one sort and another, along with income from the walking and mountain bike trails, ranger-guided as well as mindfulness walks (got the idea?), the shop, bike hire, photo-stalking with cameras as well as deer-stalking with guns, team-building activities, the bunkhouse, and the rather temporary-looking but fun sculptures scattered around the place. The £6 million new-in-2006 pier must have helped all this to happen, along with a regular ferry from Mallaig.

So what to do? Walk about in the lovely woodland of course, in among the native and foreign trees. Stroll to the campsite on the Long Beach. Look at the sculptures. And of course visit the Old Forge³⁹ which had become more of a restaurant than the cosy local pub it was a few years ago (ph 01687 462267). The visitors in the summer vastly outnumber the locals and you need to book a table, but I am not sure how when there is no mobile phone reception. It bills itself as the most remote pub on the mainland of Britain, and I guess that is right — 16-or-so rough-walking miles from the road end, if you don't come by your own boat or the ferry from Mallaig, or helicopter. It was put up for sale in 2021, offers over £425 000. Quite quickly the local community raised over £250 000 and the rest has come from the Scottish Land Fund. The deal was done in 2022. The pub is now owned by the community and I suspect they will cut back on the gastro and make it more of a pub, a warm hub at the heart of the community. There is also a small but nice tearoom with pottery (ph 01687 460191)⁴⁰.

I have not been there, but across the river by the Long Beach there is an old burial ground⁴¹ at Kilchoan, with graveslabs and a stone cross, unusually with a hole in its centre. If you don't fancy one of the pub's moorings, and want peace and quiet, then you can anchor further up the loch at Tarbet which is pretty remote, or just to the west of the moorings in Glaschoille Bay

³⁸ <https://knoidart.org/>

³⁹ <http://www.theoldforge.co.uk/>

⁴⁰ <https://en-gb.facebook.com/KnoidartTea/>

⁴¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22719/knoidart-inverie-st-comgans-church>

Loch Moidart

Notorious for its tricky pilotage, rocks to the north and south of Eilean Shona guard the entrances, above water and below water. But once you are in it is great, except you do have to get out again. As ever, Antares charts come to the rescue.

The biggie attraction is the ruined Castle Tioram⁴² on the south shore. Started in the 13th century, then modified, it fell into disrepair in the early 18th century. You can walk around it but not into it, too dangerous. Since 1997 it has been privately owned by the mysterious-sounding Anta estates whose boss, Lex Brown, wanted to convert it into a private home. After more than two decades he was and maybe still is for all I know in discussion with Historic Environment Scotland who opposed the restoration, and with local landowners. How this will end we do not know, but in the meantime the castle crumbles while the Caisteal Tioram Trust continues to agitate for a solution⁴³. Personally I don't see why any restoration could not be as good as it was for Castle Duart and Iona Abbey, both had been wrecks and both are now iconic buildings.

In a different way, car-free Shona⁴⁴ is just as good providing as it does a lovely woodland walk around the north and east sides with spectacular views up the loch. Past a ruined reservoir but above that a very well-preserved reservoir which looks as though it might be stocked with trout, past chopped-away rhododendrons, past the small pier with a couple of driftwood sculptures and a rather expensive-looking marble sculpture, and past the big house surrounded by gardens — the very big Lorimer-designed house indeed. It is available fully-catered at £250 per person per day — nine bedrooms, sleeps 18, boasts a billiard table, a grand piano, an Aga, and a dining room which seats up to 20. I think only two people actually live on the island, the various cottages are self-catered holiday lets. So a bit odd to find a village hall, but that is probably for the people renting the cottages and the house. There is clearly a lot of outside money looking after this estate (Vanessa Branson owns the place, a familiar surname). J M Barrie of Peter Pan fame once holidayed on the island, but long after he had dreamed up the well-known story, it was not I think his inspiration for 'Neverland'.

Eilean an Fheidh (Deer Island), the very small wooded and uninhabited island with no amenities or house just southeast of Shona, was sold for £311 000 in 2021, four times the asking price.

Loch Scavaig

If any of your crew are climbers, this is where to head for — the awesome back-door to the Cuillins, without doubt the most dramatic anchorage in the Hebrides. I can't better Frank Cowper's 1896 opinion: *"For those delighting in wild, extraordinary scenery this district is well worth exploring, and for doing it comfortably there is nothing like a yacht"*.⁴⁵

⁴² <http://www.moidart.org.uk/datasets/tioram.htm>

⁴³ <http://www.tioram.org/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.eileanshona.com/>

⁴⁵ Frank Cowper, *Sailing Tours: the yachtsman's guide to the cruising waters of the English and adjacent coasts. Part V. The west coasts of Scotland, the Orkneys and the west coast of the North Sea.* Upcott Gill, London.1896.

As you approach from the south the climbers will all be vying with each other to name the various peaks along the ridge, and to retell their most dramatic exploits from being helicoptered off after trying to cross the ridge without enough daylight (my dear wife in her younger days) to their fastest traverse in winter (son Oli does not hold the record but maybe would like to). But draw their attention back to sea level, and take a look at the seals on Sgeir Doigich on your way in (you may have to look back if they are sheltering from a southerly wind). And divert the climbers from discussing the niceties of rock climbing to watching out for that much more interesting piece of rock underwater as you turn in to starboard, hit by several yachts every year because it is closer to the island than you think.

These days the anchorage is more crowded than it was not so long ago. As well as yachts at anchor there is a steady stream of boats bringing tourists from Elgol. Even in the late 19th century a steamer used to call from Oban for tourists to take a look: *"Thousands have been thereby enabled to see this out-of-the-way part of the kingdom who would never otherwise have had that pleasure"* wrote John Inglis in 1879⁴⁶. And why not? The short walk up the river to Loch Coruisk and a view of the ridge is terrific. But, as Inglis rightly observed *"It is not as one among a throng of excursionists, gentle reader, that you will to the full enjoy Coruisk"*. Indeed not. Probably the first to popularise Loch Coruisk was Sir Walter Scott in his 1815 narrative poem, *The Lord of the Isles*: *"A scene so rude, so wild as this, yet so sublime in barrenness, ne'er did my wandering footsteps press, where'er I happed to roam."* Followed on by Robert Buchanan in 1871; *"Coruisk, though so accessible, is comparatively neglected; it is nevertheless the most marvellous picture in the British Isles, and one of the scenic wonders of the world"*.⁴⁷ Clearly an inspirational place.

On a very hot day, take a shower in the waterfall that cascades down into the sea. But don't get trapped here in a southerly gale, or indeed in any sort of gale. As John McClintock opines in 1938: *"Not that wind direction matters much in Scavaig, for be it north, south, east or west, if the wind be strong at all, terrific squalls, born on the mountain tops, will roar down from all points of the compass, and blast you and your boat with a broadside of venomous fury"*⁴⁸. And even earlier, in 1863 R T McMullen anchored here and later in 'Down Channel' wrote: *"Gladly as I was to have been there, I was more glad to have got free, and determined that no amount of curiosity should tempt me into such a prison of shrieking little whirlwinds again"*.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ A Yachtsman's Holidays or Cruising in the Hebrides. John Inglis, Pickering and Co, London 1879. Another early account of cruises in the Hebrides, fairly posh chaps with a skipper and paid hands. Much drinking and eating, but also interesting verbatim conversations and good accounts of the sailing.

⁴⁷ Robert Buchanan *ibid*.

⁴⁸ 'West Coast Cruising'. John McIntock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938. Another between-the-wars account of not so much the cruises in chronological order, but of the author's experiences on the west coast. There is too much history, fairy tales and misty Celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nonetheless, it gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing about what sort of boat he sailed, or about the people he met along the way, or about himself.

⁴⁹ R.T. McMullen. 'Down Channel', third edition. Horace Cox, London, 1903.

Mallaig

Pretty, like Tobermory, this is not. Mallaig⁵⁰ was founded by Lord Lovat, the local landowner, as a fishing community in the mid-19th century. It is a much rougher and tougher sort of a place than Tobermory, a working place, literally at the end of the railway line which arrived in 1901, a once thriving fishing port as recently as the 1960s but then sadly in decline, and unfriendly to yachts. But from 2012 with the arrival of pontoons⁵¹ things have definitely looked up for boaties. There is even a harbour seal to amuse. And from 2016 a spanking new shower and toilet block, all pretty good news as long as there is not a good going gale from the north.

Some years ago, Armadale on Skye was the best place around here for changing crew who could come by train to Mallaig and then jump on the ferry to Skye. However, I am biased because I used to charter from there for years in the 1970s/80s, in the days of Charlie Barrington and his Rival 34s. His successor, the very well thought of Isle of Skye Yachts, closed in 2021, and has not been replaced. So now, with the pontoons by the railway station, Mallaig is the best place to change crew who can arrive off the train (Sleeper from London to Fort William, change for the lovely Mallaig line which is thankfully still open.).

Mallaig is also good for restocking with a large Co-op, fresh fish at Andy Race fish merchants by the garage, a brilliant bakery on the harbour, an outdoor sort of a shop, and a chandlery at Johnston Brothers. But sadly no butcher, and the bookshop has gone. However, I am told there is a community-run second-hand bookshop with an excellent selection in the Fishermen's Mission, and a café. Check it out. And of course there are several places to eat and drink, which I have not properly explored. Finally, there is the community-run leisure centre with a swimming pool⁵².

Muck

The south anchorage on The Isle of Muck⁵³ is the easy one, even easier since it was buoyed making the old leading line involving the plantation on the skyline redundant. The 2004 roll-on roll-off ferry pier is rather large and lumpish, it does allow visitors to be landed more safely, and for livestock to be moved around without so much hassle as was the case with the old flit boat⁵⁴. So although the anchorage is not as pretty as it once was, and there can be swell, it retains its charm, as does the whole island, very much so. But Muck is still on the edge of the world though. There has never been a post office or shop, or doctor. There was no telephone until 1956, and direct mail didn't arrive until 1965, 24/7 electricity not until 2013 (powered by wind, solar panels and a back-up diesel generator).

The whole island is extremely pleasant, organised and well farmed, probably because it has been in the careful and loving hands of the MacEwan family since 1896. You can see that so clearly in the charming but somewhat depressing BBC documentary about Lawrence MacEwan who died in 2022⁵⁵. Muck has been spared the chaos of the fast-changing ownership

⁵⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mallaig>

⁵¹ <https://mallaig-yachting-marina.com/>

⁵² <http://www.mallaigleisure.org.uk/>

⁵³ <http://isleofmuck.com/>

⁵⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/3614742.stm>

⁵⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0016nl1/prince-of-muck>

of Eigg at the end of the last century, and the degradation of Rum by the Edwardian nouveau riche from Northern England. Nowadays Muck has a population of about 40. At its height in the early 19th century it was in the 300s, before the people were 'cleared' in 1828 and set sail from Tobermory to the St Lawrence.

Just up from the pier is the delightful tea room⁵⁶ crammed with interesting bits and pieces, and serving home-made scones, buns and so on — come to think of it, these things could hardly not be home-made given the island's isolation. And they usually do evening meals at the weekend (07470 711799). There are (or were) a couple of craft shops nearby, presumably reflecting the number of tourists who can come across from Arisaig on the Shearwater for a day trip. Just up the hill you can buy eggs, crab and lobster when available (maybe not anymore). Also there is a burial ground, and it is perhaps a surprise to find a war grave there, and further up an abandoned village — A'chille.

Do walk across the island, the views of Rum and Eigg are excellent. On the north side you will find Gallanach Lodge⁵⁷ where you can get fine what sounds like excellent dinner, bed and breakfast. And you can get dinner as a non-resident if they have room, phone beforehand in good time (01687 462365). Various prehistoric remains could be taken in during a walk round the island — the two burial cairns on Àird nan Uan⁵⁸ bounding the west side of the north anchorage, and the Iron Age fort above the south anchorage, Caisteal an Dùin Bhain⁵⁹.

The north anchorage is altogether much more sporting with a leading line requiring the identification of the correct barn of two, a wall which looks more like a cliff, and with little room to spare with the underwater reef to port. Moreover, the chartplotter does not seem to get the entrance line quite right — beware! But, as ever, it is not as bad as it sounds in the Sailing Directions, the Antares chart takes all the stress away, and the views of Eigg and Rum from the anchorage, and the wildlife, are terrific. There are always seals around, and the usual selection of seabirds, with terns and oystercatchers making the most noise. Ashore, just to the east of the lovely beach (ideal for small children who are prepared to share with the cows and horses) is a narrow gut between two reefs with an old jetty and some rail tracks (what were those for I wonder?). Along the reef is a good spot for seals. And of course one can always walk across the island to the tearoom — maybe half-an-hour, if that.

Finally, the name. Not muck as in dirt, but Gaelic for pig. Why pig? I don't know. However, it was not a name that was liked, at least not in the 18th century: Samuel Johnson noted *"It is commonly called Muck, which the proprietor not liking, has endeavoured, without effect, to change to Monk"*⁶⁰. While Boswell his companion added: *"It was somewhat droll to hear the Laird called by his title. Muck would have sounded ill; so he (that is the laird) was called isle of Muck, which went off with great readiness"*⁶¹. If you want to know more of Muck, read Polly Pullar's excellent *'A Drop in the Ocean, Lawrence MacEwan and the Isle of Muck'*, Birlinn 2014.

⁵⁶ <http://isleofmuck.com/>

⁵⁷ <http://isleofmuck.com/>

⁵⁸ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22194/muck-aird-nan-uan>

⁵⁹ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/22137/muck-caisteal-an-duin-bhain>

⁶⁰ A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland. Samuel Johnson, 1775, Ed RW Chapman, Oxford University Press, 1970 is a real classic, and full of interest about the people, posh and not so posh, and on the nature of the Scottish as seen from the view of a Londoner in his 60s.

⁶¹ The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D. James Boswell, 1785, Ed RW Chapman, Oxford University Press, 1970. This is just what it says. Longer than Johnson's account, it

Rum

Personally I have always found Rum⁶² rather dark, daunting and gloomy, maybe because it just is dark, daunting and gloomy (in contrast, the island website is quite the opposite⁶³). Walter Scott clearly felt much the same in 1814 when he landed as a guest of the Commissioners of Northern Lights from their lighthouse yacht, *Pharos* — "*Rum is rude, barren and mountainous*"⁶⁴. To my mind, the anchorage in Loch Scresort is too open, the newish pier is a blot on the landscape, the row to the shore too far, and the midges on land are vicious. And somewhere lurking in the loch is a very large chassis which we once found with our anchor circa 1978, another minus point. To compound matters, the island seems to catch all the cloud and rain on the prevailing wind, unlike Canna from where Rum is so often enveloped in cloud. In 2019, 10 visitor moorings appeared, so need to anchor if you can't be bothered.

The local population were horribly exploited by the lairds in the 19th and early 20th centuries, which you can read all about in *'Bare Feet and Tackety Boots'*.⁶⁵ Later, in the 1930s, John McIntock complained that "*Unless you are a deer you are not welcome*".⁶⁶ For a long time it was known as the 'forbidden island'. None of the 30-40 present-day residents are indigenous, and they are all, or almost all, employees of Nature Scotland⁶⁷ (previously the Nature Conservancy Council and then Scottish Natural Heritage, curiously now badging itself as NatureScot) who have owned and managed the island as a nature reserve since 1957 (which of course is good if you are into nature, sea eagles and all of that). The land round the village is now in community ownership, the result of which has been opening a 20-person bunkhouse in 2014, then cabins, a heritage centre with gift shop, and a rejuvenated general store and village hall. Not surprisingly, the Isle of Rum Community Trust⁶⁸ is trying to attract more people to move to live on the island in the new houses that are being built, and so increase its viability (at the moment there are only five children in the primary school).

focuses much more on Johnson than on Scotland, but nonetheless is a fairly easy read. It adds to Johnson's description of Scotland and the Scots, and has the advantage of being written by a Scotsman rather than a literary intellectual from London.

⁶² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%B9m>

⁶³ <https://www.isleofrum.com/>

⁶⁴ In 'Voyage of the *Pharos*' Walter Scott describes his 1814 tour round Scotland as a guest of the Commissioners of the Northern Lights on their inspection cruise aboard their lighthouse yacht. Scottish Library Association, Hamilton, 1998.

⁶⁵ *Bare Feet and Tackety Boots, a boyhood on Rhum*. Archie Cameron, Luath Press, Ayrshire, 1988.

⁶⁶ *West Coast Cruising* John McIntock, Blackie and Son, Glasgow, 1938 is another between the wars account of not so much cruises in chronological order, but of the author's experiences on the west coast. However, there is too much history, fairy tales and misty celtic legends for my taste, all dressed up in purple prose. Nonetheless, it gives a good idea of what the anchorages were like, along with some pilotage information. Curiously we are told nothing of what sort of boat he sailed, or with whom, and nor did he tell us anything about the people he met along the way. Or himself.

⁶⁷ <https://www.nature.scot/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.isleofrum.com/contact/>

I have not surprisingly been done over for my negative view of Rum by one of the long-term residents. So do please go there and judge for yourself, indeed you really *must* go there for the big, really big attraction before it falls completely to bits, an increasingly serious possibility. However, I fear it may still be closed to the public. This is the bizarre and crumbling Kinloch Castle⁶⁹, bizarre more in its history and contents than in its structure which is neo-Tudor sandstone-dull. It was built at the very end of the 19th century by George Bullough who inherited the wealth of his father, a self-made Lancashire cotton magnate. Although it was only his 'home' for a few weeks every year he spent millions on it by today's standards to impress his hunting, shooting and fishing guests — and his French wife I should imagine too. Astonishingly, many of the original contents of the house are still there in an Edwardian time-warp, undisturbed since the family sold out, and seemingly just walked away in 1957. There is 100-plus-year-old furniture like the swivel chairs in the dining room, originally from Bullough's grand yacht the *Rhouma*; damask wall coverings gently mouldering; lion and leopard skin carpets; impressive showers with their array of taps and nozzles to direct water at whatever body part is desired; instruments left behind — it is said — by the musicians in the ballroom gallery; the full-sized billiard table with the rules framed on the wall beside it; the note-book with the list of injured treated on the *Rhouma* when she was used as a hospital ship during the Boer war; and the piece de resistance — the still-working orchestrion which was originally destined for Queen Victoria at Balmoral. To get a feel for the opulence and wastage of the posh Edwardians you can do no better than read '*Bare Feet and Tackety Boots*' I mentioned earlier. Tours may or may not be available in 2024⁷⁰. When I once went the guide was a New Zealander which added to the bizarreness of the experience, but then I am not sure there are many Scots on the island anyway.

But Sir George was not just a dilettante who spent his inheritance on frippery. For example he had the billiard room artificially ventilated to get rid of the cigar smoke, he built the hydroelectric dam which still powers the island today, and he planted the deciduous woodland which is so pleasant to walk in, full of birdsong in the spring and early summer — including cuckoos.

Just after the castle had been built, CC Lynam's view was: "*the new castle of Rum ... might be imposing on the banks of the Thames, but is utterly out of place at the foot of Halival and Askeval*".⁷¹ On the other hand John Betjeman saw the castle as the "*stone embodiment of good King Edward's reign, a living memorial of the stalking, the fishing and the sailing, the tenantry and plenty of the days before 1914 and the collapse of the world*"⁷². What the future holds for this building and its extraordinary contents is very unclear. In 2021 NatureScot put it on the

⁶⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinloch_Castle

⁷⁰ <https://www.isleofrum.com/things-to-do/kinloch-castle/>

⁷¹ *The Log of the Blue Dragon 1892-1904*. C C Lynam, AH Bullen, London, 1907. Amazing and amusing account of cruises in the Hebrides, often in winter and sometimes single-handed, with many groundings, cock-ups and near misses. The 25ft centre-plate engineless yawl was built in land-locked Oxford, sailed down the Thames, round Lands End and up to Scotland, and the author "never had a paid hand on board, and never but once signalled for a pilot"! He was an unconventional and no doubt inspirational headmaster of the Dragon School in Oxford, which is why his cruises were all in the school holidays (these days I like to think he would have taught in a comprehensive school). He didn't like Cowper's Sailing Tours at all: "His knowledge of the west coast and its people is gathered from two hurried cruises and merits rather the name of ignorance ... contains nothing useful that is not taken from the official Sailing Directions."

⁷² *Scotland's Magazine*, December 1959

market for £1, found a controversial buyer but he pulled out, and it is still not sold. Of course, many millions would be needed to restore it to anything like its former glory. But better than spending those millions on weapons of mass destruction which the UK seems so keen on, and aircraft-less aircraft carriers (HMS Unnecessary and HMS Spare part as a friend calls them).

Finally, Rum features highly in a wonderfully dated — and rather dull — derring-do novel by the well-known mountaineering writer W H Murray (*Five Frontiers*, J M Dent and Sons, 1959). This is not a patch on the very best derring-do sailing novel, the *Riddle of the Sands* but that was set a long way away in the Frisian Islands.

Sanna Bay

The anchorage is more off the rather suburban Portuairk than Sanna⁷³ itself than in the bay. On a bad day Sanna beach is bleak, but on a good day it is sublime with the sand, rock pools, sunsets and a grand view from Sanna Point. But on any day it is sad because once there was a thriving community here captured in Alasdair Maclean's *'Night Falls on Ardnamurchan'*⁷⁴. Now it is all gone, more-or-less just holiday homes.

It is best to stick to the beach and the extensive dunes behind, beyond them there is a large car park to accommodate those who come by land along the 34 miles of single-track road from Strontian. There are some rather aggressive 'don't do this and that' signs, presumably reflecting the pressure of tourism at the height of the season. And some undistinguished newish houses are scattered around (some of the ruined croft houses are still there). The water-tower landmark seems to have gone, or maybe I was just looking in the wrong place as I crept into this slightly tricky anchorage in the days before chartplotters and Antares charts.

Soay

I have not been to Soay⁷⁵ for ages, indeed on the first and last occasion we were summoned into a house for a dram or two by a local man. When I noticed the shark fishing stuff hung on the wall I realised who our host was — the legendary Tex Geddes (Gavin Maxwell's partner in their unsuccessful post world war II shark fishing enterprise) who was then very much in charge of the island. Their exploits were brilliantly captured in Gavin Maxwell's *'Harpoon at a Venture'*⁷⁶ (published some years before his much more famous otter book). There are still some remains of the shark fishery buildings by the harbour. Tex died in 1998. Now the permanent population is down to three but one of them, Anne Cholawo, has written a splendid and charming account of her life there.⁷⁷

Whitesand bay

With the wind in the south this is not a bad alternative to Sanna Bay. But, notwithstanding the name, the sand is not very white and there is not a lot of it, at least not at high tide. But the view across to Muck, Eigg and Rum with Skye beyond is magnificent and the summer sunset

⁷³ <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/kilchoan/sanna/>

⁷⁴ Alasdair Maclean. 'Night Falls on Ardnamurchan'. Gollancz 1984

⁷⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soay,_Inner_Hebrides

⁷⁶ Harpoon at a Venture, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1952

⁷⁷ Island on the Edge, A life on Soay. Anne Cholawo. Birlinn, Edinburgh. 2016.

must be a sight to behold. Ashore there is the beach, but walk over to Sanna Bay for more satisfactory sand I think.