



DAVID WALSH

OILEÁIN

2ND EDITION

The Irish islands guide



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Second Edition 2014

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Introduction

Oileáin is a detailed guide to almost every Irish coastal island. The guide is comprehensive, describing over 570 islands and islets, big and small, far out to sea and close in by the shore, inhabited and uninhabited, worth the trouble visiting or not. Oileáin has always told it as it is, reef by reef, rock by rock, good or bad, pleasant or otherwise, but now even the more so. Oileáin concentrates on accessing islands – landing on them mainly, then adds information on camping, drinking water, tides, history, climbing, birds, whales, dolphins, pirates, Armadas, legends or anything else.

Since the first published edition in 2004 Oileáin has grown from over 300 to over 570 islands. Most of these newbies are close by the shore, or satellites of larger offshore islands, but not all. The main thrust though is islands up the heads of bays, well sheltered, big and small, though that isn't always so. The new material comes from all corners, from massive Whiddy/ghostly Roancarrigbeg in the south-west to little Cockle in the north-east, and from Ireland's most historic sandbank Rosslare Fort Island in the south-east to controversial Rockall in the (far) north-west.

I have always aspired to Oileáin appealing to all who go to sea in small boats, not just kayaks; divers, holidaymakers and yachties will enjoy Oileáin. The sheer level of detail in Oileáin must surely throw new light on areas and features fervent seagoers thought they already knew well. Oileáin is not about sea kayaking or even about seagoing. Oileáin is about places. Those places are solid land, but happen to be out beyond the surf line and unknown to even the vast majority of seagoers, never mind land-based folk.

It happens that kayaking is a practical way of getting to islands, which is how I myself personally do it mostly, but there are infinite other ways. SCUBA people have their RIBs and get in close. Yachties get about very well but to get in close they need good dinghies. These days there are Stand Up Boards, Sit On Tops, didgeridoos, ferries, whatever, so that even boatless folk will take something out of Oileáin.

Islands out there are the last wilderness in Ireland – there are nowadays few untrampled hills for hillwalkers. Ninety percent of islands are uninhabited outside the first fortnight in August and eighty percent even then. Ireland's property bubble has burst and in this context, in isolation, no harm. You will spend most of your time 'out there' on your own. Being on the sea will never ever stop being an adventure in and of itself, complete with genuine risk factor, so islands offshore will always, always, be the preserve of the very few.

Enjoy!

Grid References

Oileáin is unique perhaps among books describing seagoing matters in that it utilises Grid References to designate position in preference to Latitude/Longitude. This is because of the uniquely intimate relationship between very small boats and the land, seagoing – but still in close, very close. Modern yachts and all self respecting RIBs cope perfectly well with the translation, actually. Nevertheless there is a detailed description of how Grid References work, in the Glossary of Terms, at the back.

About the Author

David Walsh is a Dublin solicitor and Notary Public, living and working in Ranelagh with his wife Sheila. He has four children: Justin, Daire, Sarah and Orla, and grandson Thomas. Originally a keen walker, then climber, he has always also had a wide general interest in outdoor pursuits, including cycling, birding, canoeing and some SCUBA. On a sailing/climbing trip to Spitsbergen in 1990 he saw sea kayaks glide between icebergs in remote frozen Magdalena Fjord. He was blown away, and the next part of his life began immediately.

He bought a sea kayak within weeks of getting home, and kayaking has consumed his life ever since. By summer 1991 he was climbing new routes on offshore islands previously unheard of in climbing philosophy.

Islands became David's focus. Since first it became apparent that his 'islanding' was something remarkable he has been rigorously audited by Irish sea kayaking. David has of date of writing in July 2013 verifiably visited 503 of the current 574 islands dealt with in *Oileáin*.

He was a founder member of Irish Sea Kayaking Association and held the position of Chairman from 1995 to 2003, relinquishing the post only to see to the publication of the initial *Oileáin*.



Four sea kayakers in Magdalena Fjord, with Galway Hooker 'Saint Patrick' in background, 1990. Photo: Gary MacMahon

When he started exploring Ireland's coastline and islands, his climbing background told, and he instinctively started recording his experience. On a kayaking trip in 1993 up the west coast with his ever faithful Fred Cooney in attendance, passing Inishbofin to Inishturk, they failed to land Davillaun Island. The 'why' of that begat *Oileáin*. The disappointment that there wasn't available such simple information as 'landing half way along SE side' drove the whole project over the following 20 years.



Davillaun in 1993, after not landing. Photo: Fred Cooney



Fred Cooney and author en route to Cape Horn, Chile 2008. Photo: Des Keaney

Acknowledgements

Oileáin is and always has been a group effort. The whole Irish/ISKA sea kayaking family has been involved in its production. As a given Fred Cooney, Des Keaney and Sean Pierce are main contributors in every way. I confess I haven't tracked the input of sea-going folk over the last ten years the way I now know I should have, but I can trace the need to acknowledge, at the least, the generous input of the following in alphabetical order:

Text and other assistance

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Front cover: Branaunmore, County Clare. Photo: Conor Smith

Rear Cover: Landing the cows on Turbot Island. Photo: Conor Smith

Cover spine: Tuskar Rock, County Wexford. Photo: Séan Pierce



Des Keaney

Des Keaney edited the text of both editions of *Oileáin*. He has been leading and coaching sea kayaking since the early 1990s and runs Deep Blue Sea Kayaking.



Séan Pierce

Séan gathered the photos for *Oileáin*. A teacher by profession with a particular interest in outdoor education, he has been sea kayaking since the mid 1980s, is a former Chairman of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association, and became a Co-Director of Shearwater Sea Kayaking founded in 2007.

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Warning

The sea is inherently a potentially dangerous environment. With this considered, users of this guide should take the appropriate precautions before putting to sea.

The information supplied in this book has been thoroughly researched; however the author can take no responsibility if tidal times differ or if the information supplied is not sufficient to negotiate the conditions experienced on the day. Conditions can change quickly and dramatically on the sea and there is no substitute for utilising personal experience and good judgement when at sea or (arguably even more importantly) whilst planning a sea trip.

The guide is no substitute for personal ability, personal risk assessment and good judgement. Remember that the outdoors cannot be made risk free and that you should plan and act with care at all times for your own safety and that of others. The decision on whether to go out sea kayaking or not, and any consequences arising from that decision, remain yours and yours alone.





📷 Spring flood at Strangford Narrows (page 30). Photo: Seán Pierce



📷 Causeway Coast (page 18). Photo: Robin Ruddock



📷 Carrickarede (page 20). Photo: Johnny Parr



📷 Giant's Causeway (page 18). Photo: Robin Ruddock



📷 North coast of Rathlin (page 21). Photo: Seán Pierce

The North East

Lough Foyle to Carlingford Lough County Derry

Lough Foyle

C660-390 Sheets 3/4

Embarkation

The logical embarkation point for the outer regions of Lough Foyle is Magilligan Point by the Martello Tower. Access is by the B202 past the prison and rifle range. Do not block roads – park beside the hotel. The whole region is a security area, frequently patrolled. Military installations on both sides show the importance of the lough in such terms. Especially beware of the military zone on the beach immediately to the east of the point, Benone Beach, on which it's better not to land (certainly not while firing is going on). Accurate information for those passing the firing range can now be obtained from the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI). Further to the east, beyond the military zone, there is public access at about C716-363. There is a concrete slip across the beach. However, the beach surfs and there is a strong tidal drift. This may have relevance for launching. Expect caravans, lifeguards and beach casting anglers.

The whole lough is less interesting inwards to the south-west. There are large areas of mudflats on the eastern side. That said it is a busy, well-marked and well lit area. It is excellent for night navigation, sheltered but with strong tides. If paddling up into the city, it is possible to take out at Prehen Boat Club upstream of the Craigavon Bridge on the eastern bank.

Road access is better on the Donegal side and there are nice secluded beaches. Greencastle at C648-400 lies directly across from Magilligan Point.



The Donegal shore gets the more interesting up towards Inishowen Head at C685-438. The sea is much more exposed beyond the head.

Tides

Fierce tides push through the narrows. Maximum rates of 3.5kn should not be treated lightly. Eddies on the Donegal side run from Warren Point to Moville and are usable on both flood and ebb. Moville HW is 3:50 after Belfast.

The Narrows

Direction	Time	Springs
In	3:00 after Belfast HW	3.5kn
Out	3:00 before Belfast HW	3.5kn

The ebb begins an hour earlier at Magilligan Point.



The Spanish Armada

In 1588 the *Trinidad Valencera* hit a reef on Inishowen and came ashore east of Lough Foyle. Its crew of 450 mostly got off safely. Surrounded by British soldiers they eventually surrendered; 36 were ransomed and the rest were summarily put to death.

Downhill

C753-362 Sheet 4

There is public access at the extreme eastern end of Benone Beach at a point called Downhill Strand. The Downhill Hotel was closed and demolished with an apartment block now filling the gap. Parking and toilets are beside the apartments and access is by a stream through an archway under the railway. This spot is popular with anglers. The rocky area to the east of the prominent Mussenden Temple at C758-363 is loose basalt, eroded to provide caves and arches. Fulmar and kittiwake thrive on the sewerage outfall.

There is good access and parking at Castlerock village itself at C766-365, where there is parking and toilets at the beach access point.

County Antrim

Tidal overview

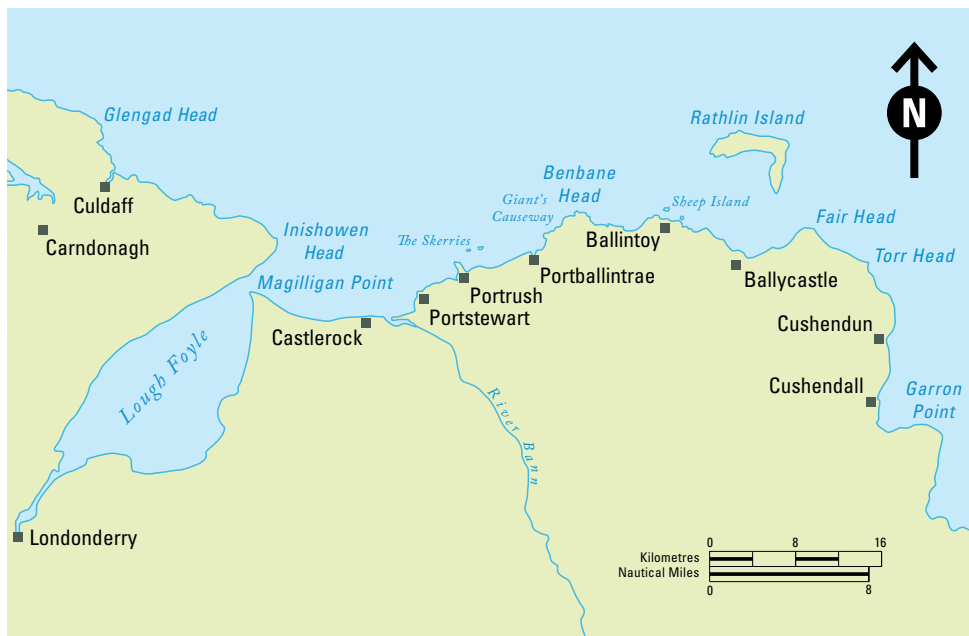
On the north coast, the tide generally turns west at Belfast HW and east at Belfast LW. The tides are

complex, particularly around Rathlin and should be studied carefully. Tides flow strongly at the headlands but there are usable eddies between.

River Bann

C783-367 Sheet 4

To the east of Castlerock village is the Bar Mouth, where the River Bann flows into the sea. Turbulent water can be experienced quite a distance offshore. The flood at the mouth is weak by comparison to the ebb. The ebb tide and the flow of the river combine to produce mighty standing waves, especially when the river is high. The flow of the river is controlled by floodgates well upstream. Powerful rip currents either side of the mouth can be dangerous. The mouth artificially narrows the stream and this projects the fresh water out with great force. The fresh water is easily distinguished in the sea water and gives a good guide as to tide direction and strength off the beaches. The river is marked as far up as Coleraine. The area is a noted birding spot in winter.



Portstewart

C815-386 Sheet 4

The area behind Portstewart Strand to the west of the town is part golf course and part National Trust. There is fee-paying access to the NT section, where there are toilets and parking. There is a powerful rip each end of the strand. When the strand is dumping, it is better to launch off a slip at Portnahapple at C813-376 which is usable in most conditions but be aware that access is difficult from car parks in the area.

The harbour at C815-386 can be difficult to enter or exit in heavy seas, with multi-directional reflected waves. The slip is exposed to surge. There is good parking and this is the access of choice in calm conditions.

There is some interesting rock hopping locally, clapotis almost always and some small caves and a blowhole that performs well in good swell. The tide can run fast around Portstewart Point.

Portstewart to Portrush

C815-386 to C856-407 Sheet 4

The coastline here is basalt and reasonably interesting, low lying at first. Rinagree Point at C833-397 is the halfway point. To its west is Black Rock and just off it lies Lawson's Rock which breaks even in a moderate swell. It is possible to shelter in the lee of Black Rock. There is a tiny storm beach accessible from landward just east of Rinagree Point. Boomers may be expected hereabouts. Rock hopping and narrow channels are best enjoyed in calmer conditions and at about HW.

Tides

An eddy runs west on the flood tide between Ramore Head to the Bann Barmouth from 2 hours before Belfast HW.

Portrush

C856-407 Sheet 4

Portrush West Bay is easily accessed under the railway line. The slipway in the harbour is awkward in swell, being quite close to the entrance and is quite busy. Consider using Portandoo Harbour at C857-412 instead, though the parking is a little more remote. There is also good parking at the western end of Curran Strand at C863-406.

Ramore Head is interesting exploring in calm conditions. Skerries Sound often kicks up and is best avoided by the inexperienced. The ebb sets up powerful standing waves.

The Skerries – Portrush

C875-427 Sheet 4

These rocky islands lie about 2km north-east of Portrush. The islands are basalt and the northern side is 'steep to' and usually has unsettled sea conditions as the tide and swell often work in opposition. They are mostly grassy and low on the southern side. Strong tide races set between the islands and associated rocks to their north. The sheltered southern side is usually settled and the best landing on the large skerry is towards the eastern end where there is almost a gap in the island. The Skerries are privately owned so get permission to land from Mr Metson in Portrush at +44-28-70857412, especially if intending to camp. There is a small brackish lake on the large skerry. Large numbers of birds nest here and some rabbits survive. The best embarkation point is at Portandoo Harbour at C857-412 on the north-eastern part of the headland which is well sheltered. The rocks south of the harbour are a nature reserve and of interest to the geologist for its ammonite exposures. There are grey seal and a small colony of common seal. The Storks at C897-425 are rocks lying 2km ESE of the Skerries and 1km NNW of Dunluce Castle. They are marked by a tall, unlit red beacon. Fishing is good hereabouts.

Tides

Skerries Sound

Direction	Time	Springs
E	6:00 before Belfast HW	1.5kn
W	1:00 after Belfast HW	1.5kn



📷 Kayaks at Portballintrae. Photo: John Vance

On the east-going flood, there is an eddy between Curran Point at C875-411 to Reviggerly at C855-415. HW Portrush is 4:40 before Belfast HW.

Portrush to Portballintrae

C856-407 to C930-424 Sheet 4

White Rocks Beach at C899-411 is accessible from the road and there are good toilet and day time parking facilities. Calm conditions are necessary as the surf can be quite powerful with large dumping waves in heavy seas. The rips are strong and the tide flows strongly just beyond the break line. The rips are easily read from above on the road.

It is mainly cliffs eastwards to Portballintrae. There are a number of interesting caves in the first section along under prominent Dunluce Castle at C905-415. One such cave is directly under the castle. Exploration of some of the other caves hereabouts requires a torch. There is good rock hopping eastwards to Portballintrae, with at least one good sheltered deep water landing in a channel about the halfway mark. Another cave just west of Binbane Cove is

40 to 50m long. Beware of a choke point halfway in, where the surge can catch the unwary.

In Portballintrae Harbour, there is a public slipway at C926-423. There are toilets and a car park which can become quite congested in summer. Local surfers prefer the larger car park at C930-424 overlooking Bushfoot Strand to the east of the town. Access to the beach is just west of the car park. Kayakers always prefer the harbour.

Portballintrae to Dunseverick

C930-424 to C999-447 Sheet 5

The rocks between the harbour and Bushfoot Strand can be fun at HW. On passage however, give them plenty of clearance. Stay at least 200m clear of the eastern harbour entrance to avoid a boomer called the Blind Rock. Bushfoot is named for the River Bush which flows in here at the south-western corner. Upriver 2km is the town of Bushmills, famed globally for its Black Bush whiskey.

The beach tends to surf and should be used with caution. After rain, a brown tongue of water enters the sea and what happens to it is a good guide to what the tide is doing. The eastern part of the beach is irregularly rocky and not a good place for small boats. There is a small slip below Runkerry House at C934-435.

The coastline eastwards is the Giant's Causeway. It is committing and there are no easy landing places. It is also one of the most beautiful sections of the entire Northern Ireland coastline.

Just south-east of the off-lying rock, the Mile Stone at C934-440 is the massive and beautiful Runkerry Cave at C935-439, complete with boulder beach and long dry passage. There are other caves hereabouts, most notably in a small cove 0.5km east of Runkerry locally called Portcoon, with a dry side entrance.

There is a slip in Portnaboe, the last cove before the Causeway proper. Visitors once walked from this point, before the access from above was organised.

The Causeway section itself is 5km around Benbane Head (C965-461). There are many exposures of geological features; dykes, sills and the various layers of volcanic activity are easily seen. The Causeway itself and all the related geology are far better seen from seaward. In strong offshore winds there are vicious down draughts and each of the bays can funnel the wind to strong gusts. Formidable tides run off Benbane Head and great seas can build up off it and off Bengore Head 1km east.



The bothy at Port Moon. Photo: Robin Ruddock



The Spanish Armada

The tragedy of the *Girona*, wrecked at Lacada Point (C952-455), was that it was the most seaworthy of several ships that sailed on 16th October 1588 from Killybegs for Scotland. 1300 were drowned, including members of most of the noblest families in Spain. The remains of the wreck were discovered c.1967 by a team of divers and a great number of artefacts including many trinkets and jewellery did survive in the cracks and crevices off the Point, as well as cannons, cannonballs and other memorabilia which are now in the Ulster Museum in Belfast.

Port Moon

Port Moon at C979-451 on the eastern side of Contham Head (C978-456) is a natural small boat harbour among low rocks at the base of a 60m cliff. A bothy (recently renovated) with a rusty roof marks the spot to the passer-by, as do the salmon net poles around it, visible when close in. The gut is 100m by 8m and there are rings on either side for shorelines. The port has 1.5m in LWS at the outer end. Landing is possible onto a sheltered but rough and stony shore/slip. Camping is nearby on grass and there is even a stream. It has the remote feel of

an island, despite a steep zigzag path up the cliff to the public Causeway Coast Path.

The coastline eastwards towards Dunseverick Castle falls away, but is bouldery. There is a small, well-sheltered harbour near Dunseverick at C999-447, about 1km east of the castle ruin, with a small maritime museum and good enough parking. Camping is possible here but forbidden, except in emergency. There are some lovely rock pools just west of the harbour, suitable for swimming and diving. This car park has saved many a kayaker a long trip if the weather breaks. Leaving a car at Dunseverick on a coastal passage is recommended.

Dunseverick to Ballintoy

C999-447 to D039-456 Sheet 5

The rocky area immediately east of Dunseverick is clifly with caves hidden from view by raised beaches. White Park Bay to the east is particularly beautiful. Portbraddan, a very pretty place which boasts the smallest church in Ireland, is a small harbour at the western end of the beach at D008-444; access and parking are poor here. It is possible to launch off a boulder beach. The salmon fishery, as with all those on the north coast, is closed. Wild salmon numbers in the Atlantic generally dropped alarmingly in the late twentieth century. Great controversy still persists as to the causation. Over fishing, global warming, diseases affecting the wild stock caused by sea lice endemic with farmed

stock, all are blamed. Stocks of similarly depleted wild sea trout have shown some signs of recovery recently, and perhaps wild salmon may someday be plentiful again?

There is a youth hostel set high above the beach itself, behind the official car park. It is a long carry to the beach and not in any way normally suitable for kayak launching. The beach gives good surf though. Boulders and a dyke called the Long Causeway obstruct the eastern end. The rocky islets east of the beach towards Islandoo at D038-457 are National Trust and give good sport in the right conditions.

Ballintoy – Ballycastle

D039-456 to D121-415 Sheet 5

Inside Islandoo lies the wonderful Ballintoy harbour at D039-456, a splendid embarkation place for this area generally, or for just a lunch stop. The tides are really powerful through the channels, even right outside the harbour mouth. The harbour has a strand for landing, two slips, toilets and even a coffee shop, but be aware of a deficit of welcome for kayakers using the public car park. It gets congested in summer. Take care towing a trailer down to the harbour, as the road is steep and twisty. Good facilities, great views, lovely.

Tides

The main offshore current floods eastwards so fiercely outside of Sheep Island that it eddies so strongly westwards on the inside that it is possible to surf in Boheeshane Bay eastwards towards Larry Bane Head at D049-452.

Sheep Island

D048-458 Sheet 5

Sheep Island lies ENE of Ballintoy Harbour and was bought by the National Trust in 1967. The rats on the island were exterminated by 1970 and it again became an important nesting site for puffin and cormorant. The large numbers of the latter indicate

healthy fish stocks in the rivers of the north-east coast. The island is flat-topped with steep cliffs on all sides, essentially a large sea stack.

There is a strong eddy between the island and Larry Bane Head at D049-452. The power of the eddy gives only a hint of the strength of the tide races in the main current on the northern side.

Landing

Landing can be made at two points. On the north of the island is an obvious bay. A boulder beach at the head of the bay gives access to a corrie-shaped area whose southern side is a narrow ridge linking the higher points of the south-western and north-eastern sides. The climb from the boulder beach is firstly on easy grassy slopes but then onto steeper rock. An exposed climb leads onto high grassy slopes. The climb should not be underestimated as the rock is loose and the slope steep.

A second landing, with easier access and support holds, is located on the south-eastern corner.



 Carrickarede Island. Photo: Jonny Parr

Carrickarede Island

D062-449 Sheet 5

Carrickarede Island is about 2km east of Ballintoy Harbour and anyone visiting the area will be directed here. It also is owned by the National Trust. It can be visited by land across its famous rope bridge, which is in place throughout the year and was once used to serve salmon fishermen. Great

bravery is required; it's far easier sometimes to visit by sea. The tide race off the north-western corner is powerful, but can often be avoided by going under the rope bridge. The sand bar here is covered on the top two thirds of the tide. The rock strata are interesting, giving good nest sites for kittiwake, razorbill and guillemot. There is a wonderful cave on the outside, visible only from the sea.

Carrickarede to Ballycastle

The cliff scenery now becomes quite majestic. The small wooded area at Port More is very unusual. Buzzards are common hereabouts. Landing may be had by an old winch on the western side of a forest. It is possible to escape here, but it is a long scramble to the nearest road.

Watch for the splendid through-cave in Kinbane Head at D088-438. Tides set strongly at the head and a very defined line separates the eddy from the flow. This is an excellent teaching area. Landing is possible on the western side of the head. A long steep path leads up the cliff to a car park on the eastern side.

Pleasant cliffs join Kinbane Head to Ballycastle, with dramatic caves. The cliff structure hereabouts is liable to rock fall, the slips evident by lack of vegetation. One such is directly above an inviting cave entrance, so do take care.

Ballycastle has a number of options for landing. The large breakwater has a concrete slip and the old pier has a slipway beside it. Car parking abounds, except in summer congestion. There is also a car park at the eastern end of the beach at D132-416 by Pans Rocks.

Rathlin Island

Chart 2798 covers the general area, as does OSNI Sheet 5. The information in the *Irish Coast Pilot*, the *Sailing Directions* and *Tidal Stream Atlas NP222* is essential on this challenging section of coastline. Rathlin lies just over 10km north of Ballycastle,

where there is a good embarkation place at the pier at D122-415. The island is served by regular ferry and boasts a stable population. Most of the habitation and services are at Church Bay. Camping with water and toilets is possible amongst old caravans at D148-506, just south of the harbour. There is a hostel in the Old Manor House at the harbour and some guest houses, the most convenient of which is just beside the large pier at D147-510. More remote camping spots can be had along the shore by Rue Point at D151-473 and along the east coast in the many secluded bays. Camping is convenient at Portawillin at D161-512 where there is a small pier with steps. The rest of the island is generally steep with cliffs towering above boulder beaches and landing is impossible or uninviting except in an emergency.



History

The island, steeped in history, has a distinct character all its own. Wallace Clark's book *Rathlin – Disputed Island* gives a lot of information about its history from the earliest settlers to modern times. In earliest times porcellanite or flint as used in Stone Age axes was mined and exported. The island was successively conquered and reconquered by the Vikings, Scots, Normans and the English. Most famously, it was litigated over between Ireland and Scotland and found to be Irish because there were no snakes (St Patrick is said to have banished all snakes from Ireland in the 5th century).

Circumnavigation

For the sea kayaker, this is one of the most committing of paddles, which is best done clockwise as the shape of the island sets up eddies to one's advantage. The eastern side is the only part where

progress could be made against the tide. The island is L-shaped and at each of the headlands there are major tide races, which are always active except at slack water, though it is generally possible to stay inshore and avoid their full force. The MacDonnell Race at the north-eastern corner is particularly fearsome and needs to be passed at slack water. Any trip plan for a circumnavigation should work back from this time.

The cliffs on the northern side are high and dark and the feeling of exposure is greatest here. There are caves in the north-eastern corner near the eastern lighthouse, the most famous of which is said to have been used by Robert the Bruce, where he met his spider. The south-facing cliffs west of Church Bay are chalk overlaid with basalt and very picturesque. There are some interesting shapes and stacks as one nears the western end of the island. The old pier at D102-509 in Cooraghy Bay gives a chance of a rest before tackling the committing part of the paddle.

Rathlin mice are the biggest in Ireland. Eider duck abound.

Tides and embarkation

The most obvious embarkation place is from Ballycastle. The tides in Rathlin Sound reach 6kn so the only time to make the crossing is on slack water (HW/LW Belfast). Start half an hour to an hour beforehand. Read the *Irish Coast Pilot* and study the hour-by-hour tidal chartlets in the *Sailing Directions for the East and North Coasts of Ireland*, (Irish Cruising Club). Refer also to the *Admiralty Tidal Stream Atlas: Firth of Clyde and Approaches*, NP222.



Rathlin Island. Photo: Mary Butler

South-west of Rue Point at D152-473, the overfall Slough-na-more is most dangerous for an hour from 1:30 after Belfast HW.

The flow on the north side of the island is always easterly due to an eddy on the ebb.

An alternative is to embark from Dunseverick Harbour at D000-445 or Ballintoy Harbour at D038-456 on the last couple of hours of the flood and to come back six hours later on the last of the ebb.

Rathlin Sound

Direction	Time	Springs
E	5:30 before Belfast HW	6kn
W	0:30 before Belfast HW	6kn

HW Rathlin and Ballycastle is 4:45 before Belfast in springs and 2 hours before in neaps.

Eddies

On a coastal trip, the eddies from Fair Head at D280-438 to Kilbane Head at D088-438 can be used as follows:

Eddies Fair Head to Kinbane Head

Main Flow	Eddy Flow	Start Time	End Time	Strongest at
E	W	5:00 before Belfast HW	1:00 before Belfast HW	3:00 before
W	E	1:00 after Belfast HW	5:00 after Belfast HW	3:00 after

Rathlin is a challenging paddle even for the experienced, and careful planning is required.

Ballycastle – Cushendall

D121-415 to D263-256 Sheet 5

There is a good view of Ballycastle Bay and Fair Head from the car park at the harbour. The strand all along Ballycastle Bay shelves steeply and any swell produces powerful dumping waves onto the coarse sandy beach. The tides are powerful close inshore and with rain, the outflow from the river by the harbour gives a good indication of what is happening.

The shore from Pans Rock at D133-417 just east of Ballycastle to Murlough Bay 6km east is unrepentant. The only landing is at Carrickmore at D164-427, the most secluded campsite in Northern Ireland. Around Fair Head, the tide races off a foreshore of big boulders that provide no shelter and are backed by enormous climbing cliffs. There can be vicious downdraughts from winds from the south. Fierce tide races may be expected and even the eddies close inshore are vicious.

These cliffs were discovered for climbers by a sea kayaker on passage, Keith Britton. In 1964, Geoff Earnshaw and Calvert Moore put up the first climb – Earnshaw's Chimney. By 2011, there were 412 routes at Fair Head cliffs, the finest in the land, bar none. This was the first recorded of many such interactions between these symbiotic outdoor pursuits, kayaking and climbing.

Murlough Bay requires landing onto the rocks near the bottom of the NT car park, but it is sheltered. At LW a beach appears east of the cottages. The road here is private, but there is a natural 'slipway' at the cottages which allows easier access, capable of being used without causing any bother to the cottages.

Eastwards, the shoreline changes to steep and unstable grass slopes intermingled with loose cliff and scree. There is a small landing east of Torr Head at D234-408. Have a look at the interesting stone shelter in the mouth of the cave. The local fishermen are particularly informative. Plan to have a fair tide hereabouts, or suffer.

The coastline south is much the same, steep grass eroded to provide exposed rock on the shore. The lack of distinct features makes judging progress difficult. There are some pleasant shingle beaches north of Cushendun.

Tides

The strongest tides on the Causeway Coast are to be found here. Big overfalls can be expected at both Fair Head and Torr Head which are particularly dangerous with wind over tide.

While the main offshore flood tide starts at Belfast LW, the flow at Torr Head and between Torr Head and Fair Head runs north-west virtually throughout the full cycle due to an eddy on the flood.

Cushendun

D253-327 Sheet 5

At Cushendun, land at the southern end where a lane gives access to a car park, near the outflow of the Glendun River at D251-334. There is a paying campsite up in the village, too far away to be convenient.

The coastline south to Cushendall is similar. There is a car park in Cushendall at the northern end of the beach, with easy access at D263-256.

Tides

Off Cushendun

Direction	Time	Springs
N	Belfast HW	4kn
S	Belfast LW	4kn

An eddy works both ways between Cushendun and Garron Point at D303-243.

Garron Point to Ballygalley Head

An eddy works both on the flood and the ebb between Garron Point at D303-243 and Ballygalley Head at D384-081.



Cushendun to Garron Point eddy

Main Flow	Eddy Flow	Start Time	End Time
S	N	2:00 before Belfast HW	1:00 before Belfast HW
N	S	3:00 after Belfast HW	5:00 after Belfast HW

Rathlin is a challenging paddle even for the experienced, and careful planning is required.

The Maidens

The Maidens or Hulin Rocks are two small lighthouse islands located 9km ENE of Ballygalley. The West Maiden is also known as the Northern Rock, its lighthouse is called the West Tower. The East Maiden is known as the Southern Rock and holds the East Tower. Both were active lighthouses until the West Maiden was abandoned in 1903. The East Tower was modernised, automated and went electric in 1977.



📷 West Maiden. Photo: Peter Edgar

Embarkation

The nearest is from a large car park with a slipway and access to a small shingle beach at D378-080 between Ballygalley and Ballygalley Head.

There is also embarkation from Portmuck at D460-024 on Island Magee which has good launching, car park and toilets. From here though there is the need to exercise great caution as it will be necessary to cross the Larne shipping channel which is used by a fast ferry in summer months and conventional ferries throughout the year.

Local paddlers tend to prefer the Port Muck embarkation and normally try to go out at about an hour and a half before Belfast LW and return after the tide has turned.

Shipping

The safest route to the island means staying north of Ballygalley Head. The port of Larne just south is busy with very fast cross channel ferries and shipping. Most ferries take a line from Larne to Scotland that passes south of the Maidens but some do pass north and then inside the Maidens when awaiting berthing space in Larne.

West Maiden

D450-115 Sheet 9

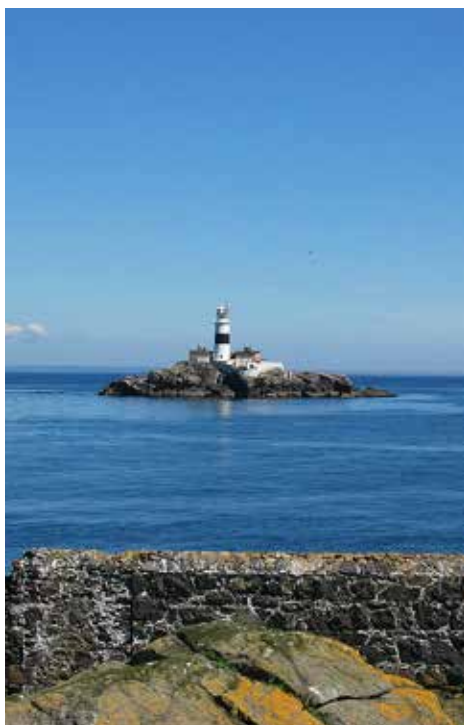
The West Tower Lighthouse and its attendant three storey cut-stone buildings dominate the island. The lighthouse tower is now gated to prevent access.

Landing on the West Maiden is more difficult than on the East Maiden. The most suitable area for deep water landing onto rock shelves is located on the western side, north of the old pier under some large rocky outcrops. No beach was found but several cuts may be usable at HW. There is an old pathway that leads north-west from the main building to the north-western corner but no steps or obvious landing was located. The old pier at the south-western corner is not suitable for kayak landings.

East Maiden

D457-114 Sheet 9

This is a small but attractive low-lying rocky island dominated by the East Tower Lighthouse and its attendant buildings. Space is at a premium but the lighthouse buildings are well maintained and their layout invites one to explore.



📷 East Maiden from West Maiden. Photo: Derek Gordon

Landing

Landing is at either the north-western or south-eastern corner onto steps or onto rock shelves at lower tides. Landing should not be underestimated as tides run strongly around the island and through the sounds and channels that separate the lighthouse islands from a series of outlying skerries. An older disused pier is located at the southern end.

Isle of Muck

D465-025 Sheet 9

A medium sized island, about 1km from north to south, located 300m off the mainland near the beautiful little harbour of Portmuck at D460-024. The island is interesting and has a nice mixture of wilderness habitats. Coastal grasses dominate the central part and the island rises steeply from west to east.

There is a beach of mixed sand and shingle on its western (in) side and a rocky bar extends shoreward off its southern point. This dries and is a problem for kayakers attempting to pass inside, especially at LW, when it is possible to walk out to the island. The island increases in height on its eastern flank to give quite attractive steep basalt sea cliffs and holds breeding populations of puffin, kittiwake, razorbill, black guillemot and guillemot. Three small rocky stacks lie off the northern end. The Ulster Wildlife Trust owns the island and information signs on the mainland do not encourage visitors.

Muck Island is off Island Magee which, despite its name, is not an island. However, it does have some excellent paddling, particularly in the section known locally as 'The Gobbins'. The best part starts after Heddles Port at D479-991 and continues to Hills Port at D485-972. It once boasted a great Victorian walkway, the remains of which are still visible from the sea. Unfortunately it was closed years ago due to disrepair. There are also seven caves in this section.

Tides

A strong tide race runs off the southern end of Muck at 5/6 knots and can produce some great standing waves and broken water.

South-east of the island during the flood, a north-going eddy means the north-going streams run for almost 11 hours of the cycle.

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