

Introduction

Contacts

Watchet Harbour Marina tel 01984 322230 VHF # 80

Watchet & Minehead HM tel 07528 208758

Watchet Harbour Marina in Somerset is another of the very few places along this stretch of coast where a small craft can enter relatively easily, and remain afloat (entry only possible a couple of hours either side of HW). Again in common with all this coast entry is not possible in strong onshore winds. Be very aware that there is a range of 10 metres at Springs and 5 metres at Neaps and keep this in mind if anchoring off.

Watchet is about 80 miles further into the Bristol Channel/Severn Estuary from Padstow in North Cornwall. In the right weather a 24-hour trip will get you here, and this could be a good place to rest up and take stock before pushing onwards.

Not that long ago Watchet was a small working (and drying) harbour, handling coasters. In the photo gallery you'll see ships lying alongside where the Marina is now.

The Marina was commenced around the millennium and is now fully established offering all the usual facilities. The tidal ranges in this area are massive, with a 10 m range not at all uncommon, and the Marina makes use of this to allow boats to remain afloat at all times.

Be aware that the marina is a separate entity (Owned by the Marina Group based in Cardiff) from the Harbour which is owned by Somerset County Council so if you want to dry out in the Outer harbour you need to deal with the harbour master who doubles as the HM of Minehead

Depths are maintained in the marina by a flap sill, with access available for a couple of hours either side of local HW for boats of normal draft.

The little town can offer all the usual facilities, and for railway enthusiasts the West Somerset Steam Railway is right outside the Marina. Steam trains run along the coast or inland to Taunton.

The Marina website is at [Watchet Marina | The Marine Group](#)

Approach

For the yachtsman or motorboater the approaches to Watchet

..... are reasonably straightforward but the powerful tides are very significant, and need to be allowed for.

If approaching from the North, (say Cardiff), the Culver Sands need to be avoided. They are marked either end by Cardinal buoyage, and lay about 6 miles to the NNE of Watchet. This shallow patch is not shown on our chart which covers the closer approaches only.

To the east of Watchet there is a firing practice area (Lilstock Range), but there are no restrictions on passing through (the area was used by the fixed wing a/c from RNAS Yeovilton and you can contact their operations on 01935 455497 to find out if it is active) To the west of Watchet there are two very conspicuous radio masts. Further Pilotage Details...

Rocky ledges extending from the coast make it very important that you maintain a good offing, and begin your approaches from at least half a mile off. **The harbour should not be approached until 1.5 hours before high water** by strangers, and should be avoided altogether in strong onshore conditions.

At the times the Marina can be accessed, the tidal flow outside is generally westbound and can be very significant. When lining up to enter, this West going flow needs to be allowed for.

The harbour can be approached from half a mile off with the entrance "open". The lighthouse (Oc.G.3s.9m.9M) and flagstaff on the Western pier are very conspicuous, but in the close approaches allowance must be made for fierce tidal currents closer to the West Pier.

Once inside the Marina lies immediately to port.

They have been struggling for depth here and have had a dredge this spring and their own dredger is expected to finish that of during May. If in doubt ring the HM for advice

Night entry is not impossible, but it's even more important to be aware of the tidal set. The lighthouse on the West Pier has a 9 mile range, and the East Pier head is lit 2FR (vert) with a 3 mile range.

Berthing

Once within the outer harbour, the Marina entrance is immediately to port...

Probably it would be wise to call them on VHF channel 80 or telephone 01984 322230 before approaching the outer harbour. A link to the Marina's website is provided below:

[Watchet Marina | The Marine Group](#)

They can handle quite large boats up to about 15 m, and the tidal gates can handle a beam of up to 7.5 m. Minimum depths within the Marina vary between 1.5 m and 3 m depending on your position within.

Entrance from the outer harbour through the Marina's flap sill is controlled by traffic signals. If you can see three vertical red lights you must wait. Three vertical green lights mean it is safe to cautiously proceed through the gate.

Berth where [directed](#) by the Marina staff, visitors normally being accommodated on pontoon C.

Charges (2021) here work out at £2.70 per metre per night (includes VAT and free shore power) or £18.00 per metre per week. Shortstays are charged at £8.50 flat rate.

The outer harbour totally dries out, and there aren't any suitable anchorages for small craft in the area.

Facilities

All the usual Marina facilities are available at Watchet. Water and electricity are connected on the pontoons, while ashore the visitor will find showers, toilets, and laundry facilities. There is also a small cafe which serves bacon rolls etc from 0800am.

WiFi is now available here too.

Diesel is available at the fuel pontoon, and boats of up to 15 tonnes can be lifted by crane with hardstanding available ashore and undercover if required. A small chandlery is on-site with Calor and camping gas available.

Watchet boat owners association has it's premises at the south end of the Western Quay, and a link to their website

is provided below:

<http://www.wboa.co.uk>

Trailer Sailers are well provided for with two ramps, one into the Marina where there is always water, and the other into the drying outer harbour. Charges come out at £10 each way, or £170 for a years unlimited use. Parking is available nearby for trailers and cars. PWCs are not catered for.

The town can provide a reasonable selection of shops for provisioning etc.

Although the town has the steam railway, it is not connected on the mainline. First National buses run an excellent service from Bridgwater and Taunton (for onward connections), with a bus stop in the middle of Watchet.

What To Do

Steam enthusiasts will find plenty to do here with the railway, while a bit of a wander round will lead you to Watchet Boat Museum where you can check out the history of this little port.

There is also a fair selection of pubs plus a few restaurants and cafes, but to be honest not an overwhelming choice... it's only a small place. The link dealing with pubs in Watchet is provided below:

<http://www.beerinevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Watchet%3BSomerset/>

There high jinks here in August see this link:- www.lovetwatchet.co.uk

History

Watchet is a harbour town and civil parish in the English county of Somerset, with an approximate population of 4,400. It is situated 15 miles (24 km) west of Bridgwater, 15 miles (24 km) north-west of Taunton, and 9 miles (14 km) east of Minehead. The parish includes the hamlet of Beggearn Huish. The town lies at the mouth of the Washford River on Bridgwater Bay, part of the Bristol Channel, and on the edge of Exmoor National Park.

History

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the early port at Watchet being plundered by Danes led by Ohtor and Rhoald in 987 and 997. It is known that it was in frequent use by small boats in 1564 possibly for the import of salt and wine from France. During the English Civil War Royalist reinforcements for the siege of Dunster Castle was sent by sea, but the tide was on the ebb and a troop of Roundheads rode into the shallows and forced the ship to surrender, so a ship at sea was taken by a troop of horse.

The primitive jetty was damaged in a storm of 1659 and a larger, stronger pier was built in the early 18th century supported by local wool merchants, although by 1797 the largest export was kelp made by burning seaweed for use in glass making. In the 19th century trade increased with the export of iron ore from the Brendon Hills, paper, flour and gypsum.

Harbour trade was aided by the coming of the railway. In the mid-1860s two independent railways terminated at

Watchet. The West Somerset Mineral Railway ran down from the iron mines on the Brendon Hills, and the West Somerset Railway came up from the Bristol & Exeter Railway at Norton Fitzwarren. Both lines made extensive use of the harbour at Watchet from where iron ore was shipped across the Bristol Channel for smelting at Ebbw Vale in South Wales.

The mines and West Somerset Mineral Railway closed in 1898. The West Somerset Railway, extended from Watchet to Minehead in 1874, survived as part of British Rail until 1979. Reopened as a heritage railway, it still operates today. In 1900 and 1903 a series of gales breached the breakwater and East Pier with the loss of several vessels each time and subsequent repairs.

Landmarks

The principal landmark in Watchet is the town's harbour and the surrounding quaysides and narrow streets. In commercial use until 2000, the harbour has now been converted into a marina. There are several museums in the town, including the Market House Museum, which explores the history of the town and its harbour, and the Watchet Boat Museum, which displays the unusual local flatner boats and associated artefacts.

Adjacent to the harbour is Watchet station. This is now an intermediate stop on the West Somerset Railway, a largely steam-operated heritage railway that links Bishops Lydeard, near Taunton, with Minehead. The trackbed of the old West Somerset Mineral Railway now forms a path, which can be followed from the harbour at Watchet to Washford station, also on the West Somerset Railway.

The foreshore at Watchet is rocky, with a high 6 metres (20 ft) tidal range. The cliffs between Watchet and Blue Anchor show a distinct pale, greenish blue colour, resulting from the coloured alabaster found there. The name "Watchet" or "Watchet Blue" was used in the 16th century to denote this colour.

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