

## Introduction

Cardiff is the capital city of Wales and its commercial docks

..... have long been busy with the export of coal. ABP run the commercial port, which is of little interest to the small craft Mariner..... other than that you will have to share the Wrach Channel with port shipping in your approaches to the Barrage Locks.

The Cardiff Bay Barrage Project was a huge civil engineering undertaking, that involved building a dam over a kilometre long between Cardiff and Penarth docks. The net result is that from the millennium onwards a huge freshwater lake of more than 500 acres was formed in a previously somewhat ugly and muddy area. From the small craft skipper's point of view this has opened up a huge area that was previously untenably tidal, with the net result that the numbers of craft moored within has mushroomed, as have facilities (more details in the history section).

Within the Cardiff Bay area there are two marinas, plus various other mooring options including two yacht clubs with visitors pontoons, plus the opportunity to moor for short stays right in the city. More facilities appear to be coming online rapidly, and over 1000 leisure craft are currently based here.

Approach and entry from the Bristol Channel area is straightforward other than perhaps at dead low water springs.

Absolutely all city facilities will be found in the area, including excellent transport links, shopping etc.

A large fleet of sea fishing charter boats work out of Cardiff Bay, in fact the second largest fleet outside Weymouth. Keen sea anglers should check the directory.

It's worth noting that there are no tidal streams within the basin so it's a good place to check the calibration of your log against your GPS!!

## Approach

If making your approach from the North East you will need

..... to be aware of the drying Cardiff Grounds banks (they dry 2.4m at CD). An inshore passage is available (not shown on our charts) if coming from Newport for example.

**Apart from strong tides that can reach up to 5 kn, the Cardiff Grounds banks are the main danger.**

If coming from the South or the West, the best plan is to make towards Lavernock Point, and give it a good offing. The red can buoy Raine (FI(2)R.5s) should be left well on your port side, and the southerly Cardinal buoy S.Cardiff (Q(6)+LFI.15s) is left to starboard. These can be seen on the Wrach Channel chart provided. From here, making good a northerly course with a touch of west will bring you to the dredged Wrach Channel.

Look out for Penarth Pier, and leave it well off on your port side, while identifying and leaving the westerly cardinal buoy Outer Wrach (Q(9)15s) fairly close to starboard.

A night approach can be made using the white sector of the directional light shown on the chart, close to the entrance to the commercial docks (Oc.WRG.10s5m3M).

As can be seen on the charts, the Wrach Channel is narrow and all shipping using the commercial docks need to use it, and while in it and nearby they will be constrained by draft and unable to manoeuvre. Therefore small craft Mariners need to keep a sharp eye out for ships approaching or leaving the commercial docks, and keep out of their way. At the time of reporting (Feb 2013) commercial traffic into and out of Cardiff docks has dried to a trickle of about four or five ships per week. A listening watch should be kept on VHF channel 69 for safety broadcasts made by Severn VTS. Information on expected and actual shipping movements for Cardiff can be obtained here:

[http://www.southwalesports.co.uk/Live\\_Shipping/](http://www.southwalesports.co.uk/Live_Shipping/)

The APB authorities recommend that small craft keep to the Penarth side of the Wrach Channel, and if a crossing of it has to be made, it's done at right angles and as quickly as possible. There is enough water to keep out of the channel providing there is an ample rise of tide. It will be necessary to use the Wrach Channel in the final approaches to the barrage, leaving the red can buoy Penarth Head (Q.R) to port. The final approach to the barrage is made by leaving the RGR Barrage can buoy (Fl(2+1)R.10s) to **starboard (it's a "preferred channel mark" for cargoe vessels going to Cardiff Docks)**, having passed an unnamed red can buoy (Fl.R.2.5s). A further matching pair of buoys, red can and green conical define the channel into the outer harbour... pass between these and into the outer harbour where you will see the locks (check photo gallery).

If approaching from eastwards via Bristol Deep, the safest bet is to leave the Monkstone Lighthouse (Fl.5s) well off to starboard, and generally heading WSW also leaving the red can Cardiff Spit buoy (Q.R), and the southerly Cardinal buoy S.Cardiff (Q(6)+LFl.15s) on your starboard side before swinging to the North to locate the Wrach Channel. The instructions already given can then be used. Alternatively, if coming from or going to Bristol, there's no reason depending on state of the tide and draft why you can't route directly between the Outer Wrack ECM and the NW Elbow ECM at half tide but be careful if approaching on the ebb because there are some fairly shallow bits there and, of course, they shift a bit

In general strong winds from the East can make the closer approaches uncomfortable, but the Cardiff Grounds drying banks can provide some shelter if your approach timed to arrive at the barrage (at) approximately half flood.

In all cases before attempting to enter the outer harbour permission will be needed from Barrage Control who work 24 hours on VHF channel 18 and can also be contacted on 02920 877900. Call them up in the approach when you're near the Outer Wrach Cardinal buoy and arrange your passage through the lock. They will also be able to confirm depths available in the approach channel and outer harbour.

The entrance to each of the three locks is controlled by standard traffic signals, three vertical red lights flashing mean emergency, three vertical red lights = do not enter lock, green white green(vert) = enter lock only on instructions from barrage control, three greens arranged vertically = enter lock.

The Wrach Channel has plenty of water for yachts, but the shallower approach to the barrage locks may not have enough at LWS for some craft. Probably the best plan is to make sure you arrive with a suitable rise of tide underneath you.

The Harbour Authority for the whole Cardiff Bay area produce a very useful website and a link is provided below:

[Cardiff Harbour Authority - Cardiff Harbour Authority](#)

## Berthing

Once you are through the locks and into this vast expanse of freshwater,

..... visiting yachtsmen or motorboaters have the following mooring options: Penarth Marina, Cardiff Bay Yacht Club, Cardiff Marina, Mermaid Quay and Cardiff Yacht Club. Full details are now provided, including visitors prices.

Anchoring looks tempting on studying the chart, but is not an option (see further berthing section.)

### Penarth Marina

The long-established Penarth Marina has been aquired by the Boatfolk organisation and is the very first you will come to; it lies immediately to port as you exit the barrage locks. Originally it was necessary to lock in and out of the

Marina, and the lock is still there and sometimes occasionally used if the water levels in Cardiff Bay drop too much. In general though this lock is now left open for free flow at all times, but you will still need to contact the Marina before you enter as they use one of the gates as a pedestrian bridge.

You can call the Marina on VHF channel 80, callsign Penarth Marina, to arrange your entry, or you can telephone 02920 705021.

Normally vessels will be able to proceed straight through the lock into the marina basin. Visiting vessels may be asked to wait on a reception pontoon in the lock where they will be met by marina staff and allocated a berth. Skippers should be aware that a slight flow may be experienced within the marina lock barrel.

Entry to the Marina lock is controlled by traffic signals with the following meanings, double red = danger keep clear of lock, single red = lock in use, keep clear, green = enter lock on receiving instructions from staff.

Short-term berthing fees here (2022) work out at £3.50 per metre per night, with a minimum of £15. This is a full service Marina, and its facilities are covered shortly. A link to Penarth Marina's website is provided below:

[Penarth Marina | boatfolk](#)

### **Cardiff Bay Yacht Club**

A little bit further into the River Ely, on the Northern bank lies the pretty new and recently renamed Cardiff Bay Yacht Club. Since the barrage was completed there is water here at all states of the tide, and the club maintain pontoons. Their visitors pontoon is the first when you come to in the River Ely on your starboard side They will charge you £18 per day to use that and a bit extra if you want shore power. There are showers in the club and you will be asked for a £10 deposit for a gate key. They also have a bar and restaurant.

You will need to make prior arrangements with the club for using this pontoon, and you can telephone the Office on 029 2066 6627, or the clubhouse on 029 2022 6575. A link to their website is also provided below:

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

### **Cardiff Marina**

A new Marina, Cardiff Marina, has been established further up the River Ely before you reach the fixed bridge. It is on the starboard side (North) and provides pontoon berths within the River. Obviously since the barrage was built the River is not tidal.

Taking a fairly central course down the River Ely will bring you to their pontoons after you have completed passing all the pontoons belonging to the Cardiff Bay Yacht Club. They advise when in the River to keep at least 8 m away from the wall at all times because there is a step under the waterline.

They can be contacted on 029 2034 3459, and a link is provided to their website below:

<http://www.themarinegroup.co.uk/cardiff/marina>

This is another full service Marina, and its facilities are covered shortly. Short-term visitors berths work out at £3.12 per metre per day (2022) with an extra charge for electricity (you get cards from the office)

### **Cardiff Yacht Club**

Cardiff Yacht Club has its premises and moorings in the north-western corner of Cardiff Bay. This club has pontoon berths dredged to 2.5 m, and reserves some spaces for visitors with boats up to 37' only. The club is welcoming and friendly and should you wish to use their facilities it would probably be best to contact them in advance. They do not charge for mooring but ask that visitors support the Club bar. They are happy for visitors to use the club toilets and showers when Club members are available to let them in. If you arrive late you may well find the Club locked up. You can telephone them on 02920 463697, and a link to their website is provided below:

<http://www.cardiffyachtclub.org/>

## **Mermaid Quay and the Graving Docks**

There are shortstay facilities available at Mermaid Quay right at the north end of Cardiff Bay, absolutely central for the city. These pontoons are seen quite clearly in the photo gallery, and are for daytime use.

You simply arrive and tie up, put some money in a pay and display type machine which gives you a ticket. On the ticket is your access number for the gate.

The pontoons at Mermaid Quay and visitors berths in the Graving Docks at the North end of the bay are run by the harbour authorities and are the least attractive of the facilities available in the bay. They consist purely as places to tie up; they were installed with facilities for water and shore power but those facilities are not connected up. On the pontoons payment is made by a pay and display machine and the entry code for the gate is given on the ticket supplied; within the South Westerly of the graving docks the pay and display machine has broken down and (if local information is correct) the cost of repairing/replacing it outweighs the revenue provided by it so it will remain broken. Berthing there is free and the shore power and water has been disconnected. The central of the three docks is close for access and the North Easterly one has a set of isolated pontoons floating in the middle. Toilets are shared with the general public. The Mermaid Quay pontoons do not permit longer than a 24 hour stop (for £24) but it is not somewhere one would want to stop for more than 24 hours. Ideal for a "Run ashore" from the North Somerset Coast or Bristol.

Conclusion:

I think it would be fair to say that this whole Cardiff Bay area is a rapidly developing (with over 1000 resident boats already), and an extremely appealing expanse of clean water. Once within the Mariner will escape all the problems associated with the huge tidal ranges in the Bristol Channel. Facilities are being enhanced and developed faster than they can be put on the latest charts, and we can expect more. The authorities who planned and executed the Cardiff Bay scheme are to be congratulated.

## **Facilities**

### **Penarth Marina**

The facilities at Penarth Marina include water and electricity (extra charge) on all the pontoons, with 340 berths. Security is handled by special key fobs or pin numbers for visitors, with access being controlled to the pontoons and the shoreside facilities. Staff are on duty 24 hours a day.

BT openzone provides WiFi coverage in the Marina.

The fuel berth supplies diesel and petrol while chandlery (gas bottles), boat and engine repairs, sailmaking, and rigging services are available on site. The marina can lift boats of up to 20 tonnes and provide full boatyard services.

Holding Tank pumpouts are handled by the harbour authority adjacent to the barrage locks.

Provisioning is easy enough with a Tesco's supermarket within a 10 minutes walk, and you can even hire bicycles from the Marina office.

A couple of restaurants will be found right next to the Marina. All other town facilities will be found in Penarth, a long established holiday resort town. This is about 10 minutes walk away from this Marina. In 2011 a cafe/restaurant (called Pier 64) was opened in the marina and this supplies meals/snacks throughout the day and has an alcohol licence.

## **Cardiff Marina**

Water and electricity (payment cards) are available on the pontoons, with security handled by CCTV. Outside of office hours a key fob entry system is used. The office is open 9 AM to 5 PM weekdays, and Saturday's 9 AM to 1 PM.

The new toilet and shower block in the centre of the Marina is open 24 hours a day for berth holders.

Free WiFi is available to all berths, the key available at the Marina office.

Diesel fuel is available but only during office hours, and tank pump out facilities are available. A platform Crane especially suitable for mast work is on site, and can also lift smallish boats up to 4.5 tonnes.

A water bus pick up point will be in operation shortly directly from the marina's pontoon D for a quick and easy way to get to the city, while for provisioning there are several nearby supermarkets the nearest only being a few minutes walk away. There are regular buses into town and trains from the station just across the river. it's a fair old hike into town so you will need to use those.

There is now a co-located restaurant in operation. .

## **General City Facilities**

Cardiff being the capital city of Wales can offer just about any facility you would expect to find. The Marinas are somewhat remote from the city as is the Cardiff Bay Yacht Club. Bicycle hire or water bus will get you there. Cardiff Yacht Club is somewhat closer to the action, while Mermaid Quay is right on a brand-new waterfront development. Should you care to investigate further this is what you will find:

"Cardiff is one of the top ten retail destinations in the UK, with two main shopping streets (Queen Street and St. Mary Street), and three main shopping arcades; St. David's Centre, Queens Arcade and the Capitol Centre. The current expansion of St. David's Centre as part of the St. David's 2 project will see it become one of the largest shopping centres in the United Kingdom. As well as the modern shopping arcades, the city is also home to many Victorian shopping centres, such as High Street Arcade, Castle Arcade, Wyndham Arcade, Royal Arcade and Morgan Arcade. Also of note is The Hayes, home to Spillers Records, the world's oldest record shop. Cardiff has a number of markets, including the vast Victorian indoor Cardiff Central Market and the newly-established Riverside Community Market, which specialises in locally-produced organic produce. Several out-of-town retail parks exist, such as Newport Road, Culverhouse Cross, Cardiff Gate and Cardiff Bay."

For crew changes, or if you are considering keeping your boat here, transport connections are excellent.

### **Railway**

Cardiff Central Station provides direct InterCity links to nearby Newport and other major cities such as Bristol, Birmingham, London, Manchester, Nottingham, Southampton, Portsmouth, Newcastle upon Tyne, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

### **Cardiff Airport**

Domestic and international air links to Cardiff and South & West Wales are provided from Cardiff Airport (CWL), the only international airport in Wales. The airport is situated in the village of Rhoose, 10 miles (16 km) west of the city. There are regular bus services linking the airport with the Cardiff Central Bus Station as well as a train service from Rhoose Cardiff International Airport railway station to Cardiff Central.

### **Inter City Buses**

National Express provides direct services to other major cities, as well as to Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil. Megabus operates frequent discounted services to London.

## Trailer Sailers

Considering the attractions of the non tidal Cardiff Bay for trailer sailers there is a distinct lack of launching sites. This is a real shame because the fast running waters and massive tidal range of the Bristol Channel are not really suitable or safe for sailing dinghies etc. In fact we have deliberately refrained from covering some launching sites for this reason.

Cardiff Bay Yacht Club has an excellent launching ramp, but this is available to members only, with no temporary membership available.

It is to be hoped that further slipways will be developed, and any info concerning this would be appreciated.

## What To Do

The two marinas and the Cardiff Bay Yacht Club are quite a way from the city of Cardiff, but Penarth Marina is within very easy distance of Penarth town, a long established seaside resort. Unfortunately from its heyday of day time steamer trips from Minehead and Clevedon and a lively beach front it has become a mainly dormitory town and one can find oneself wandering aimlessly along residential streets looking for some signs of life; you are better off going for the Cardiff City Centre option.

Cardiff Marina and Cardiff Bay Yacht Club are reasonably close to local facilities but still a good hike into the bright lights.

Otherwise if you can organise transport to Cardiff city centre there is a huge choice available. Cardiff has a strong nightlife and is home to many bars, pubs and clubs. Most clubs and bars are situated in the city centre, especially St. Mary's Street, and more recently Cardiff Bay has built up a strong night scene, with many modern bars & restaurants. The Brewery Quarter on St. Mary's Street is a recently developed venue for bars and restaurant with a central courtyard. Charles Street is also a popular part of the city.

The area between Cardiff Bay and the City (the old "Tiger Bay") is now mainly residential and many of the old shops of Bute Street are boarded up; your choice is to remain in the well developed area of the Bay (loads of eateries and bars) or lift and shift to the city in the knowledge that at chucking out time you will have to join the madding throng for a taxi back to wherever you've moored your boat

As usual it is not our place to delve too deeply, but to leave you with some links for your perusal:

Pubs Penarth (read the reviews before you make a choice)

[Penarth pubs and bars: pubs in Penarth.](#)

Restaurants Penarth and Cardiff

[Restaurants in Penarth - Updated September 2022](#)

Pubs Cardiff

[Cardiff pubs and bars: pubs in Cardiff](#)

# History

Cardiff is the capital, largest city and most populous county of Wales. The city is Wales' chief commercial centre, the base for many national cultural and sporting institutions, the Welsh national media, and the seat of the National Assembly for Wales. According to recent estimates, the population of the unitary authority area is 321,000 and is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK. Cardiff is a significant tourist centre and the most popular visitor destination in Wales with 11.7 million visitors in 2006.

The city of Cardiff is the county town of the historic county of Glamorgan (and later South Glamorgan). Cardiff is part of the Eurocities network of the largest European cities. Cardiff Urban Area covers a slightly larger area, including Dinas Powys, Penarth and Radyr. A small town until the early 19th century, the city came to prominence as a major port for the transport of coal following the arrival of industry in the region. Cardiff was made a city in 1905, and proclaimed capital of Wales in 1955. Since the 1990s Cardiff has seen significant development with a new waterfront area at Cardiff Bay which contains the new Welsh Assembly Building and the Wales Millennium Centre arts complex. The city centre is undergoing a major redevelopment. International sporting venues in the city include the Millennium Stadium (rugby union and football) and SWALEC Stadium (cricket).

## Building of the docks

In 1793, John Crichton-Stuart, 2nd Marquess of Bute was born. He would spend his life building the Cardiff docks and would later be called "the creator of modern Cardiff". A twice-weekly boat service between Cardiff and Bristol was established in 1815, and in 1821, the Cardiff Gas Works was established.

The town grew rapidly from the 1830s onwards, when the Marquess of Bute built a dock which eventually linked to the Taff Vale Railway. Cardiff became the main port for exports of coal from the Cynon, Rhondda, and Rhymney valleys, and grew at a rate of nearly 80% per decade between 1840 and 1870. Much of the growth was due to migration from within and outside Wales: in 1841, a quarter of Cardiff's population were English-born and more than 10% had been born in Ireland. By the 1881 census, Cardiff had overtaken both Merthyr and Swansea to become the largest town in Wales. Cardiff's new status as the premier town in South Wales was confirmed when it was chosen as the site of the University College South Wales and Monmouthshire in 1893.

Cardiff faced a challenge in the 1880s when David Davies of Llandinam and the Barry Railway Company promoted the development of rival docks at Barry. Barry docks had the advantage of being accessible in all tides, and David Davies claimed that his venture would cause "grass to grow in the streets of Cardiff". From 1901 coal exports from Barry surpassed those from Cardiff, but the administration of the coal trade remained centred on Cardiff, in particular its Coal Exchange, where the price of coal on the British market was determined and the first million-pound deal was struck in 1907. The city also strengthened its industrial base with the decision of the owners of the Dowlais Ironworks in Merthyr (who would later form part of Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds) to build a new steelworks close to the docks at East Moors, which was opened on 4 February 1891 by Lord Bute.

## Recreation

Cardiff is known for its extensive parkland, with parks and other such green spaces covering around 10% of the city's total area. Cardiff's main park, Bute Park (which was formerly the castle grounds) extends northwards from the top of one of Cardiff's main shopping street (Queen Street); when combined with the adjacent Llandaff Fields and Pontcanna Fields to the north west it produces a massive open space skirting the River Taff. Other popular parks include Roath Park in the north, donated to the city by the 3rd Marquess of Bute in 1887 and which includes a very popular boating lake; Victoria Park, Cardiff's first official park; and Thompson's Park, formerly home to an aviary removed in the 1970s. Wild open spaces include Howardian Local Nature Reserve 32 acres (130,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of the lower Rhymney valley in Penylan noted for its Orchids & Forest Farm Country Park over 150 acres (0.61 km<sup>2</sup>) along the river Taff in Whitchurch.

## The Cardiff Bay Barrage

The Cardiff Bay Barrage lies across the mouth of Cardiff Bay, Wales between Queen Alexandra Dock and Penarth Head. It was one of the largest civil engineering projects in Europe during construction in the 1990s.

## History

The concept of a barrage was first suggested in the 1980s as a way to help regenerate Cardiff's largely disused docklands. The barrage would create a large freshwater lake intended to attract investment into the docklands. The bay was part of the Bristol Channel which has the second largest tidal range in the world. As a result, for half of the day, the bay was empty of water, leaving large unappealing mudflats exposed. The barrage was consequently seen as central to the regeneration project. The government established the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation to build the barrage, and to redevelop the area as a whole.

## Opposition

Opposition to the project came from many quarters. Some local politicians (including the area's MP, Rhodri Morgan, now First Minister of the Welsh Assembly) said the scheme would cost too much money. Local residents feared that their homes would be damaged by the permanently raised water level. Environmental groups strongly opposed construction because the bay was an important feeding ground for birds, which would be lost following impoundment.

## Construction

Construction, which was undertaken by a Balfour Beatty / Costain Joint Venture, started in 1994, following the successful passage of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Act of 1993 through the UK Parliament. The bill included provisions for compensation for any homes damaged by the barrage and a large wetland habitat for birds further east down the Bristol Channel. Features include a fish pass to allow salmon to reach breeding grounds in the River Taff and three locks for maritime traffic. Construction was completed in 1999 and shortly afterwards the barrage came into effect. The impounding of the River Taff and River Ely created a 2 square kilometres (490 acres) freshwater lake.

## Today

The barrage has played an important role in the regeneration of the area. Attractions such as the Wales Millennium Centre, the National Assembly for Wales, shopping and watersports have since moved onto the waterfront. In 2000 the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was dissolved, and the Welsh Assembly awarded a contract to Cardiff County Council to manage the barrage, as the Cardiff Harbour Authority (CHA).  
Sluices at the Cardiff Bay Barrage

One of the major selling points of the proposed development was the opening up of a new pedestrian and cycle route across the barrage. This would not only enhance tourism on both sides but provide a pleasant and safe short-cut between Cardiff and Penarth, cutting two miles off the journey otherwise taken on the heavy-traffic roads further upstream. However, this benefit took years to materialise due to a lack of agreement between the derelict access land owners (Associated British Ports) and Cardiff Council. The "unfinished" barrage was the cause of much embarrassment to the Welsh Assembly.[citation needed] The Cardiff Harbour Authority have made significant progress in the creation of bay edge walkway and have redeveloped a large portion of the previously unaccessible bay periphery. The barrage was finally completed and open to the public on Monday 30 June 2008, allowing public access from Mermaid Quay to Penarth Marina. The Cardiff Harbour Authority has developed a Sea Angling zone on the outer breakwater arm.

The barrage has been short listed for the British Construction Industry Award (BCIA) to find the 'Best of the Best' construction project over the last 20 years.

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