

Introduction

A pair of islands in the Firth of Clyde, Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae, lie....

... close to the mainland shore, not far at all from Largs Yacht Haven. Great Cumbrae island offers a couple of anchorages, and free mooring buoys laid off it's town of Millport, which lies in a bay on the South side of the island.

These moorings are sheltered except in strong winds from the South, and there are some facilities ashore. The National Watersports Centre had it's base on the eastern side of Great Cumbrae, close to the ferry slipway but that has now closed

Little Cumbrae offers an uncomfortable anchorage in a bight on It's eastern side.

Quick links to nearby harbours: [Largs, Yacht Haven and Surrounding Areas](#) , [Rothesay, and Anchorages Around Bute](#)

Approach

Starting with Little Cumbrae Island, the Anchorage lies in the bight...

... formed by Broad Islands to the North, and Castle Island (c/w ruined castle) and Trail Island to the South. For those who have them, there is an Antares chart of this anchorage. The bay is relatively shallow and lies almost diametrically opposite the Hunterston power station on the mainland shore.

Little Cumbrae is privately owned, and is currently being used as a meditation/yoga centre. A slipway is connected to the shore just inside the North end of Castle Island. Attention needs to be paid to the shallows around Trail Isle.

Nose into the centre of the bay and anchor in 2m+ at CD. This anchorages somewhat exposed and subject to swell.

Great Cumbrae anchorages include one off White Bay on the north of the island, this could provide shelter in southerlies and is shown on the chart provided.

If anchoring anywhere around the NE end of the island, keep well clear of the ferry slipway and note that dive boats are very active in the immediate area... landings can be made at the boat harbour. The Watersports Centre in this small harbour has been closed and the premises are in the process of being sold (2022)

Slightly further to the south will be seen more small craft moorings, and the possibility of an anchorage tucked in close. Nothing much ashore.

The main anchorage for Great Cumbrae, is off the town of Millport situated in a bay that takes up most of the south of the island.

Massive changes going on here right now, with breakwater construction.

<https://www.peelports.com/media/vxmce2yr/cntm-09-24-firth-of-clyde-millport-flood-prevention-scheme-breakwater-construction>

If approaching from the north-east via the Hunterston Channel, give a good offing to Farland Point, the extreme south-east tip of great Cumbrae Island... tidal disturbances will be experienced closer in, so leave your turn to starboard until the town of Millport is bearing NNW.

Approach to Millport from South via the Hunterston Channel is straight forwards, as is the approach via the Cumbrae Pass between Little Cumbrae and Portachur Point on the south West tip of Great Cumbrae.

A southerly Cardinal buoy (No38) is moored to the South West of this point and marks Portachur Spit radiating out from this corner.

There are various islands and drying rocks encumbering the closer approach and these are described in the next section.

Berthing

This section deals with the closer approach to Millport Harbour.

Note: 2024 Work in progress that will cut of the normal approach and affect the moorings:

<https://www.peelports.com/media/vxmce2yr/cntm-09-24-firth-of-clyde-millport-flood-prevention-scheme-breakwater-construction>

Millport Bay has 2 larger islets, The Eileans, and three much smaller islets, The Sproig, The Leugh, and The Clanch cluttering the approach.

These are best seen on the large scale chart provided.

From the South West it is possible to follow the coastline of the Bay inside of The Clanch and The Leugh. Attention need to be paid to Nupkur Point which has drying reef extending from it.... give it a good offing.

2024: see NTM linked above. The entry point below will be blocked off.

The normal entry point is between The Eileans and The Sproig, with the head of the pier bearing 333°. There are leading lights on this line. Otherwise you can line up the extreme bitter end of the pier with a church tower... this will bring you in on the same bearing.

There are now 30 visitors buoys in Millport bay and their layout can be seen in the diagram in the Navigation Gallery. Every time we check on the cost and how to pay we come across different answers The North Ayrshire website says that their buoys are free; end of story. The honesty box at the end of the pier may, in fact, be a charity box for the Garrison. NACC who lay and service the blue/black buoys confirm that these buoys are free and that they have no connection at all with the Garrison "Honesty Box" which carries the NACC logo (a hang over from years gone by)

Otherwise it is possible to anchor to the South West of the pier clear of the rocks. It may be possible also to get a temporary alongside berth on the inside of the pier itself, clear of the steps - but that depends very much on the present state of the pier.

Millport Bay is pretty well exposed to the south and the south-east, and if strong winds from these directions are forecast, it may be best to clear out.

On the eastern side of the island there is a small boat harbour (not really suitable for larger boats unless conditions are calm, but okay for dinghy landings). They have a small pontoon here which you may use for no charge. It can be a bit lumpy so, if depth or keel permits you might be better on the inside of that. Mind you, it is a 3 mile walk in to Millport but you may be able to catch the bus from the ferry to Millport (last one from Millport to the ferry in the summer is about 2200)

Facilities

Ashore at Millport, water is obtainable by jerry can at the pier.. The local garage sells diesel, apparently not petrol. A small boatyard near Portachur Point may be able to help out with liftings and repairs for smallish craft. (Try 01475 530566)

The town is surprisingly well served with shops including newsagents, grocers, gift shops, clothes shops, electrical shops and hardware stores. For exploring there are cycle hire shops, with several hundred bikes between them.. an ideal way to get around the island.

Transport is available by ferry to Largs, from the East side of the island, adjacent to the National Watersports Centre.

Millport is popular with yachtsman during the summer.

What To Do

Again for a town of this size, Millport boasts a bit more choice than you may suspect. There are Indian and Chinese restaurants, chip shops, and various pubs serving food.. quite apart from the cafes.

Check out the links below for further information:

Pubs, Millport

<http://www.pubutopia.com/pubs/M/Millport/index.html>

Restaurants, Millport

[Restaurants & Places to Eat in Millport 2021 - Tripadvisor](#)

History

Little Cumbrae

Little Cumbrae lies barely a kilometre to the south of its larger neighbour, Great Cumbrae. The islands are collectively referred to as The Cumbraes. In stark contrast to its neighbour, green and fertile Great Cumbrae, Little Cumbrae is a rough and rocky island. With its many cliffs and rocky outcrops, Little Cumbrae bears more of a resemblance to a Hebridean island than to some of its neighbours in the Clyde.

A number of uninhabited islets skirt the island's east coast, Castle Isle, the Broad Islands and Trail Isle.

Today the island's main settlement is at Little Cumbrae House on the eastern shore, facing the Scottish mainland.

Little Cumbrae was privately purchased in 2003 and there were plans for its development as a memorial park, nature reserve and corporate escape, but the island was sold again in July 2009 for £2 million. The buyers of the island, Scottish millionaire couple of Indian extraction, Sarwan and Sunita Poddar, opened there a yoga and meditation centre with the help of yoga guru Swami Baba Ramdev. There have also been rumours of the new owners planning to rename it "Peace Island", but those have been denied.

Cumbrae Lighthouse was built in 1793 by Thomas Smith who was under commission from the Commissioners of the Northern Lights. The lighthouse lies on a broad raised beach on the western shore of the island looking out into the Firth.

Prior to the creation of the lighthouse, Little Cumbrae had an open fire light atop Lighthouse Hill. This extremely old

structure can still be seen.

Great Cumbrae

Great Cumbrae is the larger of the two islands known as The Cumbraes in the lower Firth of Clyde in western Scotland. Home to the National Watersports Centre, the Cathedral of the Isles and the University Marine Biological Station, Millport, the holiday island has an 18-hole golf course which sweeps almost to the summit, and a round-island road much favoured for family cycle runs.

The island is 3.9 kilometres (2.4 mi) long by 2 kilometres (1.2 mi) wide, rising to a height of 127 metres (417 ft) above sea level at "The Glaidstone" - a large, naturally occurring rock perched on the highest summit on the island. There is a triangulation pillar nearby, as well as a orientation point which indicates the locations of surrounding landmarks.

In clear conditions, views extend north over the upper Clyde estuary to Ben Lomond and the Arrochar Alps. To the west, the larger islands of Bute and Arran can be seen, while on the other side of Knapdale the Paps of Jura may be visible. Looking south, Ailsa Craig is visible, around 40 miles (64 km) distant beyond Little Cumbrae. Ailsa Craig roughly marks the halfway point to Northern Ireland, which itself may be glimpsed in extremely favourable conditions. To the east, the views are not so extensive, being restricted by the higher ground of the Renfrew Hills only a few kilometres distant, however the town of Largs and village of Fairlie and the deep water coal terminal and power station at Hunterston can be seen.

Millport, the island's only town, is spread around a bay which makes up the entire south coast of the island. The usual island population of 1,434 (2001 census) increases substantially during the summer tourist season due to the high proportion of second homes.

The land on the island is primarily owned by the farmers, with the other major land owner being the Millport Golf Club.

Flights across the Atlantic from British and many European airports often pass over the island and can give an excellent view of the surrounding area.

History

The island has been inhabited since the end of the last ice age.

Legend has it that St Mirren, on his return to Scotland from Ireland around AD 710, arrived in Cumbrae and, following the example of St Patrick, rid the island of snakes. The Cathedral of the Isles is reputed to have been built on the site where St Mirren preached. Cumbrae to this day remains snake-free. St Mirren then went on to found a community in Paisley.

It is claimed that the Viking king, Haakon, used the island as a base before the Battle of Largs (1263).

Cumbrae has long been linked to Christianity in Scotland. At one time the island had many standing stones. The Aberdeen Breviary of 1509, printed in Edinburgh, tells of two of the island's early female missionaries, Saints Beya and Maura.

For many centuries the island was under shared ownership, with the Marquess of Bute in the west and the Earl of Glasgow in the east. In 1999 the final feudal landowner, Le Mans winner Johnny Dumfries, now Bute, of Mount Stuart House, put the island up for general sale, with first refusal given to his farmer tenants.

Tourism grew in the 20th century, and Millport became a popular stop for Clyde steamers and families going 'Doon the Watter for the Fair' (Glasgow Fair holidays). Today most visitors are daytrippers, mostly due to the growth of foreign package holidays in the 1960s. It is still possible to experience a traditional day out on the PS Waverley which operates from both Glasgow and Ayr during the summer.

Tourism

During the summer, the population grows by several thousand every weekend. Hiring a bike and cycling around the island's 11 miles (18 km) encircling coastal road is a popular activity for visitors, as the roads are quiet compared to the mainland. There are informal walks all over the island. Fintry Bay, around 3 miles (5 km) from Millport on the west coast, has a small cafe.

Millport Bay, with visitor moorings, is a popular destination for sailors in the summer. The National Watersports Centre at the ferry slip provides tuition in most boating disciplines, such as powerboating and kayaking, all year round. The most dived site on the Clyde is just south of the ferry slip – a Second World War Catalina flying boat.

Transport

A Caledonian MacBrayne car ferry connects the island with Largs, Ayrshire on the Scottish mainland.

A new ferry, MV Loch Shira, built at Ferguson Shipbuilders in Port Glasgow, entered service on 2 June 2007. Major alterations are in progress to Largs pier, at first the new ferry may have had to sail to Fairlie every night to be tied up.

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