

Introduction

Contacts

Harbour Master tel 01271 862108 VHF # 16/12

Ilfracombe is a natural harbour located at the southern entrance to the Bristol Channel; although, today, it looks very much man-made one can see that the beach at the top of the harbour was the beginnings of what has developed since pre-history into the harbour that we see today.

There have been various stages of development from a sheltered beach over which fish and various supplies could be landed, through a walled harbour which traded with other Channel ports (coal & limestone one way and agricultural products the other) and eventually further abroad to Ireland and France. It was also a useful jumping off point for various bellicose adventures in Ireland, Scotland and, of course, during our spats with the French and Spanish.

As with many villages of this nature the habitation around the harbour kept itself aloof from the "landed" people at the back of the town and that continued through the Victorian era when the tourist industry developed alongside the fishing industry so that to this day all the hotels and most of the B&B trade is "up the hill" from harbour. Today there are only two "families" fishing out of Ilfracombe and they occupy the accommodation above the tourist shops along the quay; the rest of Ilfracombe is given over to the holiday trade which has declined in the last half century due to the "package holiday" industry. There have been various proposals on the drawing board to put marina facilities in here but all have sunk through lack of funding or opposition from those who see the "quaintness" of the harbour as a tourist asset (and who's to say they are wrong?)

What we have is an inner harbour which dries completely at low tide and the yachts moored within that get about two hours either side of HW access to the sea and outside that is the outer harbour which also dries at low water though, on the visitors moorings a 1.5 metre draft boat can get, at least, half tide access to the sea. The LWS water line is at the end of the steamer pier and the anchorage there is sheltered in all but NE to East weather but in those conditions it is very uncomfortable. A knowledgeable skipper would choose Watermouth Bay a mile and a half to the East of here to hole up in Easterly conditions.

Ilfracombe's main attraction for the yachtsman is that, in most cases, one can get to it from the eastern end of the Bristol Channel in a single tide (mind you from Avomouth you'd need a boat capable of 7kts through the water) but, of course, when you get there you'd have to wait for a few hours for there to be enough water to enter! Going the other way you can leave Ilfracombe at half ebb and, staying very close in to the shore in the various bays (where there are back eddies) get to the Foreland as the flood sets in and then shoot on up the Channel to arrive at your destination at HW.

It's other attraction is its Yacht Club the interior of which was done by the local yachtsmen back in the eighties and has been improved over the years by volunteers - they have a website at:-

[Ilfracombe Yacht Club](#)

The harbour itself is a delight, a real sun trap on a summer's afternoon; it can get a bit busy at the weekend in the summer but there is plenty of room for everyone and the harbour is well served with outlets for you to spend your money!!

There is a harbour website at

<http://www.northdevon.gov.uk/business/ilfracombe-harbour/>

Approach

Coming from the west strong tidal races will be

..... found off Bull Point (Fl(3)10s54m20M). An offing of 5 miles will clear this. That's the "official" warning!

In actual fact you will have timed your run to be going past Hartland Point northbound at half flood and across Morte bay with about two hours to run before HW at Ilfracombe. Aim to pass just under a cable west of the Morte Stone SHM (the overfalls inside it can be viscous and scary, though they will eventually spit you out in the right

direction, they are best avoided!) before turning towards Bull Point. The tide will carry you out round the rocks to the west of Bull Point so that when the North Devon coast opens you can turn east and romp the last few miles to Ilfracombe on the last of the tide. It is totally unnecessary to plod all the way out round the Horseshoe buoy, just scratch your boat's name on Bull Point with a boat hook as you go past - it's very deep close in and there are no overfalls there. That's an exaggeration but fifty yards off is far enough. Ilfracombe lies along the coast about half a mile eastwards of Capstone Point, and about 200m east of Lantern Hill (Fl(2)G.5s 39m6M). Don't cut the corner too tight coming into Ilfracombe, hold off until the south end of the pier (second green light) becomes open and, at night use the leading lights (Oc10s) on a bearing of 188°T.

Those leading lights are to keep you clear of the rocks and pier to the east of Lantern Hill; as soon as you pass the second set of greens, turn starboard for the end of the inside pier. The other point to make is that, although its characteristics say it is visible for 6 miles, the light on top of Lantern Hill is not at all obvious and "lantern" is probably still the best description!

There is now a very obvious sculpture on the pier which will help to identify it from further out but be aware that it is not on the very end of the pier (see photo gallery)

Approach from the east involves sailing outside of the Copperas Rock green conical buoy (Fl.G.2.5s), and maintaining a good offing from Rillage Point to avoid overfalls. These overfalls are not that active on the ebb, especially the back end of it so if they are not visibly white don't worry about them. Final approach as above. A word to the wise; the tidal stream past the harbour can reach three or four knots which is not a big problem unless you forget to allow for it and get downstream so-to-speak. It is noticeable that many skippers coming across from the Welsh coast, when they have identified Ilfracombe, turn towards it forgetting that they have still four or five miles to run (about an hour?) and that the original course to steer needs to be maintained (even though it appears that the destination is way off on the port or starboard bow.) The result is that they immediately drift down the tide and end up plodding in from the Bull Point area against the tide. Remember that 3 knots is three nautical miles an hour and that means when you sight Ilfracombe you need to aim for a point three miles up the coast to get there.!!! Upon entering keep close to the pier, to avoid running up the rocky drying outcrops radiating out from Larkstone Beach.

HM listens on VHF Ch 16 and works on 12 and 14

Berthing

Anchor by carefully nosing into the Outer Harbour, watching out

..... for the rocky ledges and leaving plenty of room for vessels leaving the inner harbour and using the pier walls. Always use an anchor light at night. At neaps you will have more leeway and shallow draft craft may even remain afloat. There are eight Yellow mooring buoys (Marked "V") generally used by bilge keelers. These are just to the East of the middle pier and dry out. Have a care; the buoys support both a stern line and a bow line. When you pick up the buoy, attach the head rope to your bow and unclip the stern rope and tie to your stern. Please, on departure, re-clip the stern line to the bow line.

They now have three Red mooring buoys to the East of the Yellow Visitors buoys; they are for use by Commercial operators and should not be picked up by visiting yachts unless directed to do so by the HM

We have given a chartlet of the harbour showing the available spots for visitors. Be careful of the alongside moorings (V12 to V14) it is very shallow there and you should ensure that you will have enough water to get away when you plan and not end up neaped. Those three moorings have the advantage of having shore power available but the disadvantage of not getting any sun until after lunch. The alongside berths against the North Quay are very open to holiday makers who can be careless about where they ditch their empty food containers especially as the waste receptacles are normally full by teatime at the weekend.

Harbour chart of [Visitors Mooring Allocation \(northdevon.gov.uk\)](http://northdevon.gov.uk)

Fin and long keel craft may lean against the wall in the inner harbour (worth booking with HM in advance), and there are fore and aft moorings for bilge keelers available also. Deeper draft craft should leave entry into the inner harbour to about 2hrs before HW.

All craft anchored or moored within the outer or inner harbours are liable for harbour dues of around £1.71 pm. (2022) with a reduction for a whole week.

Harbour website:

<https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/business/ilfracombe-harbour/>

Phone: 01271 862108

Facilities

Showers and toilets available in the yacht club and are accessible 24/7 (See the HM) Water is available from taps on the quay-sides and shore power is available to some of the moorings on the South side wall. The harbour has diesel fuel but petrol will have to be obtained in cans from Hele village to the East of Hillsborough (a fair old plod) There are no longer any chandleries in Ilfracombe but, if you are short of a shackle or something of that nature most of the sailors in the yacht club are cruisers and would help you out in extremis. There are plenty of shops for stocking up your galley.

What To Do

Most sailors visiting here make a bee line for the yacht club which is open every evening from Weds to Suns and from 1100 on Weds & Suns; it's close on Monday and Tuesday. They have a good galley and never give a visiting sailor the cold shoulder. Mind you, it can get so busy in the summer with visiting Welshmen that you might have to wait a wee while for service but it's normally achieved "dreckly"

Other than that there are so many extremely good pubs and restaurants around the harbour it would be impossible to single any one out.

For entertainment there is the Pavillion (given an irreverent name noting the similarity between its architecture and that of Madonna), there is a cinema (which once gained the unwanted description as one of the worst flea pits in England) which runs the same films as the West end of London and, should you want to wander further afield the theatre in Barnstaple runs some good programmes.

You will also find much to amuse on a wet day in the museum or the aquarium

History