

Introduction

There are no contacts for this harbour.

Portmahomack lies 3.5 miles SW of Tarbat Ness on the Dornoch Firth side of that peninsula. It consists of a single L shaped pier which gives shelter from the NNW through E to SSW. There is seldom room for visitors to berth inside so realistically there is only the shelter given by the land from Easterlies to So'westerlies. Boats visiting here generally anchor in the bay to the SW of the pierhead.

The name derives loosely from the name of the church (St Colmaccs) when rendered in the Gaelic and there have been quite extensive archaeological investigations here, some as recently as 2007, and there is a visitor's centre in the old church displaying the finds.

The harbour here was developed originally for the export of grain which is evidenced by the large grain store (similar to those at Burghead) which has now been converted into flats. The larger store was built in 1779 and the harbour itself was improved by Thomas Telford (he of Caledonian Canal fame) early in the nineteenth Century and is still as it was then.

The Highland Council installed a pontoon earlier in this century but the harbour is largely self governing and there is no provision for visiting boats on that pontoon. The harbour dries almost completely at low water so is of no use to fin keelers. Despite this, Portmahomack is a popular destination for yachtsmen based around the Moray Firth most of who will drop in here at least once a season if not more.

It is a small, attractive village and popular with tourists some of who return here year after year; the local boat owners are hospitable and would not obstruct you if you are forced by the weather to raft inside.

Approach

From the East and South be sure to give the NE side of Tarbat Ness a good half a mile offing.....

.....to avoid the reef which extends out to the NE from the Ness lighthouse; apart from the shallows to go aground on there can be quite heavy overfalls at some states of wind and tide.

Once round the Ness or approaching from the north stay a couple of cables off shore until you can see NE into the harbour before turning in towards it. You can then run in to anchor to the South West of the pierhead but be careful of the uncharted Curach rock.

That rock is marked on some GPS charts but the accuracy of this is suspect and we, although seemingly anchored quite close to it could find no evidence of it and the local professional creel boat owner advised us we were well clear.

In the event that the wind changes direction during your stay here you should be able to enter the harbour and raft on one of the local boats against the wall as long as you can take the ground. We found it necessary to rig an outside breast rope to a kedge anchor to avoid the boat inside.

Berthing

This has been dealt with above. When they get a new HM (which may be a while) the charges are in line with the rest of the Highland Council Harbours, about £23 per night but until there is an HM there's no-one to collect them

Facilities

Water may be obtained from the tap at the root of the pier. Some publications say that fuel is available; afraid not, the garage closed. We were not able to locate the showers mentioned in the Reeds.
There are public toilets at the far end of the fore shore on the Tain Road.
The shop and Post Office are co-located

What To Do

You will find one pub which is well frequented and may be the attraction for local sailors; there is also a very good, if pricey, restaurant (The Oystercatcher) and a small cafe; just back from the foreshore in the Carnegie Hall Community Centre which has Wifi and 13 amp sockets beside their tables.
This has funny opening times and is not open on Wednesdays or Thursdays. There is a regular bus service to Tain which has a large Tescos, an interesting history and a museum.
The church (St Colmacs) on the inland side of Portmahomack has been converted into a museum and is well worth a visit

History