

## Introduction

### Contacts

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Wick Harbour is managed by the Wick Harbour Trust and is outwith the Highland Council's sphere of influence. They first put pontoons in the outer harbour in 2007 but removed them and replaced them with pontoons in the inner harbour in 2009. This is much more sheltered and is safe from all wind directions, once you are in. The entry to the harbour is difficult in anything over force four from the Eastern quadrant and downright dangerous over force six. This is because one has to turn across the sea to gain entry to the NNE facing harbour entrance (you can see how bad it gets in our photo gallery for this harbour) and records for the 1800s (pre steam) tell of many wrecks.

There have been many periods of development going right back to pre history, all in connection with the sea. The name "Wick" is derived from the Norse and it was the Vikings who held this area of Scotland in earlier times; the first settlement was on the North side of the river and it was not until the early 1800s that Thomas Telford was commissioned with laying out a "modern" fishing town which he did on the South side, calling it Pulteneytown after Sir William Pulteney who commissioned it.

It was laid out on a grand scale, the dwellings at the top being for those making the biggest profits from the fishing and the area at the bottom of the hill for the people who did the work. The ruined breakwater to the SE of the present harbour was built in the 1860s in an attempt to protect the harbour from Easterly storms which it did for about nine years after it was built and then was, itself, wrecked by the said storms!!

There is a large area of sheds and warehouses backing the harbour and in the herring boom this was a hive of activity associated with the gutting, curing and storing of herring; there were coopers, net makers, sail makers, boat builders etc. It has to be remembered that, although Wick was developed as a fishing town in the early 1800s the railway didn't arrive here until 1874; before the arrival of that railway, Wick was virtually cut off from the rest of the world other than through the port so all the fish landed here had to be processed and then put back on ships for export so that there was as much going out as coming in (more if you count the export of agricultural products from the hinterland); busy place indeed.

Nowadays there is much less activity, the herring have gone, the whitefish quotas have hit and hence the marina has been built to maximise the income for the Harbour Trust. The marina has an excellent lay out, plenty of room to manoeuvre, and wide berths. They would have had room to put in more berths and made it as tricky to get into as those on the English Channel, but given the amount of leisure traffic up here they've got it about right and anyway they can always increase the number of berths at a later date if they have the trade.

**That last paragraph was written quite a few years ago and has proved to be true because, now, in 2022, they have a massive wind farm under construction and an oilfield being decommissioned off the coast so have have put in three heavy duty pontoons in the NW corner of the Inner harbour and have dredged the River Harbour to take commercial cargo vessels. The navigation lighting has been changed to match this re-opening of the River Harbour so, if you intend a night arrival, you'd best have a look at the new set up.**

**The main use by the cruising yacht fraternity is as a convenient spot to gird ones loins for the Pentland Firth or to lick ones wounds after crossing it.** A quick word here about the Pentland; do it at the wrong time of tide and in the wrong weather and you'll take a battering and risk foundering; do it at the right time and it's a pussy cat; maybe a lively pussy cat, but a pussy cat nonetheless. You will hear many nth-hand tales of gloom and disaster and may have even witnessed some but it's really not any worse than any other tidal choke point around our coastline. A trip from Stromness to Wick can take six or seven hours (depending on the size of boat) on the right tide but on the same day, if you miss the tide, it can take ten hours and also be wretched. **The timings for this passage are given as an additional notes in the "More Info" section below:**

It is of interest that as far back as 1840 there was growing alarm in Wick at the amount of whisky being consumed and, as a result, in 1922 Wick went "dry" and remained so until 1947. The Pulteney Distillery was forced to close its doors through lack of trade in 1930 and did not reopen until 1951. So, the United States didn't invent Prohibition, the Scots (who invented just about everything else) did and they hung on to it long after the States gave it up; mind you the Scots didn't have an Alastair McCapone to deal with (but you can bet there were many "speakeasies" but called something cleverer in the Gaelic!)

There is plenty of interest in the town to keep the visitor busy, especially if interested in history and it's a good spot to re-provision for your onward trip; very few yachtsmen cruising in these seas pass it by. It's about a hundred miles from Peterhead, fifty or so from Banff/Whitehills and the same from Lossie and Inverness. Onward and Northward, it's convenient for Scrabster (if West Bound), Stromness and west about the Orkneys to Kirkwall, or via Holm Sound or Deer Sound to Kirkwall and the Northern Orkneys.

## Approach

If the wind is forecast for over force four from ENE to SE don't bother trying,

in these days of four day forecasts there is no excuse for arriving here in weather that is going to put you and the rescue services at risk. Remember "Port Closed Signal" (previously Black Ball hoisted) now replaced with high intensity Port Closed Lights.

[Wick marina website](#)

Given that proviso the entry here is free of problems night or day. We have given a waypoint in the middle of the bay which is in the white sector of both the sector lights; at night just make sure you are following the correct light or you'll end up trying to get into the River Harbour.

Be very certain that the first apparent harbour entrance (which is open to the East and very obvious on the approach) is not the one you (as a leisure yachtsman) are heading for; you want the one indicated by the prominent white light house (sector light at night) well to the left of the River Harbour entrance. This is shown in our photo gallery. (You may think we're making a fuss about this but on one visit here there was another visitor swanning about the River Harbour at HW bleating on VHF that he couldn't see the pontoons!!)

Coming from the South, if you want to, you can ignore the Waypoint and, once you have sighted the PHM (Fl(2)R.6s) marking the old breakwater, on rounding the South Head you can make directly for it and thence to the harbour entrance.

Coming from the North you need to be a bit more circumspect rounding North Head; you'll see the lighthouse on the pierhead quite early on over the top of the drying Proudfoot rocks extending outwards from North Head; do not be tempted into cutting the corner, the bottom is quite confused and can chuck up quite a sea, even out to the 20m line. (Don't ask us how we know this!!)

Give the pierhead light about 50 yards offing when turning into the harbour entrance and be prepared for outbound traffic emerging from the right once you are running in. (You, of course, when exiting will have wandered over nearer to the middle of the outer harbour before lining up the departure on the starboard side of the channel but there are some as doesn't!). There are leading lights to give you a line up to turn in on at night.

In settled weather it has been known for cruisers to sail into the outer harbour before clearing away to go alongside but probably best to do this out in the bay, especially at the weekend when there is quite a bit of too-ing and fro-ing by angling dories.

## Berthing

Most almanacs and pilot books give an alongside mooring in the outer harbour as an option but...

... this is no longer the case, the HM will direct you to the marina in the inner harbour. Those of you who have been here before will notice the three new pontoons up in the corner of the Inner Harbour and the increased activity on the "Commercial Pier" - that's all to do with wind farm support and marks another episode in the history of this very northerly harbour.

There are normally plenty of berths on the first pontoon you see as you enter the inner harbour and, if you are a

small boat, one of the berths nearer the pontoon bridge is probably preferable.

Their prices (2022) are being held at £22.50 + VAT a night. That includes shore power.

## Facilities

Water and shore power is available at all visitors' berths and some of the berths further in (on the most westerly pontoon a "Christmas tree" adaptor and extensions were needed on a very busy weekend). Toilets and showers are available and accessed by a key. You get the key and Marina fob from the HM on arrival but if you arrive out of hours there is a key safe at the bottom of the pontoon access bridge (It's a good idea to obtain the combination to that safe from the HM during any communication prior to your arrival).

They now have a refuelling facility for deisel and petrol is available at the filling station in Pultneytown (see our Google link). Gas & Gaz refills can be bought at the "Heat Centre" behind the Swimming Pool (again see our Google Link). There used to be a chandlery but that is now closed.

Those of you who were familiar with Wick a few years ago will know of the small super market which used to exist beside the river beyond the old bridge; that has now closed and for any significant provisioning you will need to go to the out-of-town Tescos near the Airport but there is a regular bus service to that. Otherwise there is an assortment of shops for basic supplies in the town over the bridge.

There are rail, bus and air connections to the South (but you'd need to be on an expense account to use the air!)

## What To Do

There is very little in the way of convenience food on the South side of the river. "Wickers World" at the West end of the harbour does excellent food and confectionary as well as a very good breakfast.

There is a fish and chip shop a few doors up from that and it is under new management and now opens until about 2100.

On the South side of the old bridge there is a wining and dining spot (Mackays Hotel) and there are other good restaurants in town; plenty of exotic take aways and the Wetherspoon on the Square does a very good breakfast.

Other places to eat can be found at:-

[Restaurants & Places to Eat in Wick Tripadvisor](#)

## History